COMPOSING COMMUNITY: SOCIAL PRACTICE COMPOSITION AND THE PERFORMANCE OF COMMUNITY IN CHORAL WORKS BY REENA ESMAIL, JULIA WOLFE, AND DAVID LANG

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Music
with a concentration in Choral Music
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2021

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnomusicological study within the field of choral conducting of how an ideal of community-building, central to the practice of Western classical choral music, shaped the creation and performance of three recent choral works by American composers: Reena Esmail's *Take What You Need* (2016), Julia Wolfe's *Anthracite Fields* (2014), and David Lang's *crowd out* (2014). Drawing from literature on "social practice" in art criticism and performance studies (Jackson 2011; Bishop 2012; Courage 2017), I introduce the related term *social practice composition* to characterize the style in which the co-creators of these works rendered "community" visible in musical performance: through the configuration of social relations between performers and participants in sound and on stage as an integral part of the compositional artwork itself. I treat premiere performances of Esmail's, Wolfe's, and Lang's works as individual case studies in social practice composition, following an ethnography of musical performance approach (Madrid 2009; Buchanan 2016). In each case, I argue that the specific ways that the composer and their collaborators brought individuals and communities into relation with one another through musical performance point toward distinct meanings of community present in the choral field: for Reena Esmail and her collaborators in Skid Row, Los Angeles on *Take What You Need,* community as a site of personal and social healing (Koen, Barz, and Brummel-Smith 2008; Stige 2016); for Julia Wolfe and her collaborators in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on *Anthracite Fields,* community as an expression of cultural authenticity (Muller 2002); and for David Lang and organizers in Chicago, Illinois on the 2017 performance of *crowd out,* community as a source of social capital (Putnam 2000). Taken together, these studies point towards ways that professionals and amateurs in the field of Western classical choral music in the United States today put ideas about community to use and demonstrate how choir becomes a site where musicians and community members alike imagine, contest, negotiate and maintain contemporary meanings of community. As a dissertation in choral practice, I use ethnomusicological methods to

offer a critical reflection on the aesthetics, participatory strategies, and professional responsibilities of musical artists working in the choral medium who employ social practice composition as a form of community engagement, in order to encourage the theorization and growth of this working method in the fields of composition and choral music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through their doctoral fellowship program. I acknowledge and thank the council for their support.

This dissertation is about how people come together to make music in community through creating new choral music, and as such it would not exist without the incredible work, past and present, of so many artists and participants who originally created and performed these musical works, and of those who have supported and welcomed my own work to document this practice. So many thank yous are in order:

To Reena Esmail, Julia Wolfe, and David Lang, for writing thought-provoking and urgent music, and being unafraid to ask big questions. This research obviously would not exist without your music. An extra thank you to Reena and David specifically for speaking to me at length about your work.

To all the artists and administrators who so generously gave your time in interviews and facilitating site visits. Thank you to Vijay Gupta, Leeav Sofer, Kate Richards Geller, Janelle McKoy, Flo Gardner, Alan Harler, Paul Rardin, Laurie McCants, Leah Stein, Rich Tolsma, Donald Nally, Tim Munro, Paul Durica, and Alison Cuddy. Your work continues to inspire me.

To all those singers, participants, and community members who made these pieces happen. These pieces would not be what they are without you, and I hope that this research demonstrates that. Specifically, thank you to the singers of the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia and the Urban Voices Project for making me feel welcome, albeit briefly, in your communities during my visits in June and December 2019 respectively. To those who responded anonymously to surveys throughout this project as well: I have never met you, but I am grateful for your insights.

To my colleagues at Western University (London, Ontario) and University of Toronto Scarborough. I have leaned on the support and expert advice of so many of you as I navigated my own transition from student to teacher. With thanks and gratitude to Kathleen Allan, Gloria Gassi, Jennifer Moir, Mark Ramsay, Janet Loo, Patrick Schmidt, Cathy Benedict, Ruth Wright, Paul Woodford, Kari Veblen, Kevin Watson, Sophie Roland, Betty Anne Younker, Roger Mantie, Laura Risk, Mark Campbell, Lynn Tucker, Kotoka Suzuki, Daniel Hasznos, Tony Leong, and Lloyd McArton.

To all my students at Western University and University of Toronto Scarborough, and participants in the community singing program at London InterCommunity Health Centre. Making music together is a continual inspiration and a privilege, and I have learned so much from you. I wish I could name each and every one of you here.

To my friends and graduate school colleagues. Connecting and re-connecting has kept me afloat during the pandemic that has occupied half the writing time for this research, and I have shared thoughts on this project with many of you along the way. Thanks for your listening, singing, conducting and friendship: Geoffrey Williams, Won Joo Ahn, Alex Underwood, Allegra Martin, Joseph Baldwin, Mike Schmidt, Mark Woodcock, Jon Arnold, Mark Grizzard, Chris Mason, Kirsten Hedegaard, Aaron Peisner, Sarah Paquet, Stephanie Tubiolo, Matthew Cramer, Hannah Carr, Nathan Reiff, and Jacob Swindells.

To my many past teachers. I am continually aware of how parts of your teaching surface in my own music-making and teaching every day. Thank you for your guidance and mentorship over the years: Hilary Apfelstadt, Ivars Taurins, Henri-Paul Sicsic, Mark Vuorinen, Norbert Palej, Maggie Brooks, Jeffrey Douma, and David Hill.

To my committee for believing in this research, and in my ability to bring it to fruition. To Janet Barrett and Erik Lund: thank you for specifically helping me see how this project could best

speak to composers and music educators, for your feedback on methods, and for connecting me to so many other good people and research. To Mike Silvers: thank you for sparking my interest in ethnomusicology, for your patient commentary and revisions, and for gently and positively encouraging me to develop my own scholarly trajectory. To Andrew Megill: thank you for letting me do something outside the box that spoke to my own interests and direction as an artist and educator, and for teaching me everything I know about conducting.

To my extended family. To Eric, for helping me understand academia and for 26 years of friendship. To all my aunts, uncles, and cousins, for being as much friends as family. To Norma, for singing to the very end. To Alan, for your love of music and sparking my own. To Jack and Marg, for your faith in family, knowledge, and community, and encouraging us all to "carry on."

To my nuclear family. To Georgina, for always being up for a furry cuddle. To Jean, for your conviction and commitment to social justice that continually inspires me to be a better person. To my parents: this research was intimately shaped by being the son of a doctor and a city manager, and I know the questions I ask here are your questions too. Thank you for a lifetime of learning to ask these questions, for your love, support, belief and trust.

Finally, to Noël, for the journey already taken together, and the one that lies ahead, with all my love.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL PRACTICE COMPOSITION IN THE CHORAL ARTS

Community is always both the situation in which musicking takes place and a creation of musicking practices.
—Wayne Bowman, "The Community in Music" (2009, 114).

This dissertation is an ethnomusicological study within the field of choral conducting of how an ideal of community-building, central to the practice of Western classical choral music, shaped the creation and performance of three recent choral works by American composers: Reena Esmail's *Take What You Need* (2016), Julia Wolfe's *Anthracite Fields* (2014), and David Lang's *crowd out* (2014). Throughout this dissertation, I contend that the ways that community was made visible in sound and on stage in these works exemplifies an emerging and distinct practice of Western art music composition which I term *social practice composition*. I draw my understanding of the term "social practice"[1] from the fields of art criticism and performance studies, where it has been adopted to signify a diverse constellation of community-engaged and participatory artistic practices that explore "the character of the social experiences at the heart of such [artworks]" (Atkins 2013, 228; see also Jackson 2011; Bishop 2012; Courage 2017). I argue, as well, that the word best encapsulating the social character of these three specific choral works is "community." My central focus throughout is the ways in which the co-creators of these works (composers, conductors, singers/participants, organizers, and funders alike) invoked community in relation to an ideal of choral musical participation, and the different meanings of community they attributed to their work together. Specifically, I ground my study of musical community-building by analyzing how co-creators enacted specific configurations of social relations between individuals and communities through musical composition and performance, in the service of issues of social importance within the communities

[1] My use of the term "social practice" differs from its common use in the social sciences to refer to how recurrent everyday human actions and patterns of behavior both shape and constitute social structure (e.g., Giddens 1984).

for, with, or about whom these works were created. In undertaking this study, I contend that the degree of conscious attention that co-creators of these works paid to the creation of social relations in and as part of "the music itself" is worthy of a new terminology and dedicated study of social practice composition as a form of community engagement in the choral arts.

In this introductory chapter, I first introduce the concept of social practice composition holistically through three brief vignettes and an analytical reflection on the case study works that form the core of this dissertation. I then offer a literature review of social theories of community and a short historical account of how contemporary Western choral practice has come to signify an ideal of community today. Finally, I offer a theoretical premise for placing these case study works in conversation with art critical writing on social practice, and a rationale for my use of ethnomusicological research methods for the study of performance (Madrid 2009; Buchanan 2016) in the context of a dissertation in the field of choral conducting. I conclude with an overview of the case study chapters that follow.

Case Studies in Social Practice Composition

2016: In Los Angeles, California, a composer spends a year attending rehearsals of a community choir based in the Skid Row neighborhood, comprised of singers who are either currently experiencing or who have experienced living in a condition of homelessness. Through getting to know the choir members and taking part in their rehearsals, she writes a new piece of music for the choir to premiere alongside a professional orchestra and chorus on their annual December concert at a local mission. Based on themes of offering and taking support, the piece makes room for the audience attendees to sing along in call-and-response, as well as for community members to speak about their own life experiences during instrumental interludes. The piece is performed on an annual concert in Skid Row every year since and is also taken up by choirs across

the United States partnering with local organizations addressing homelessness or other social issues in their own communities.

2014: In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the city's largest symphonic community chorus premieres a newly-commissioned, evening-length concert work for choir and amplified chamber ensemble exploring the history of labor and immigration in Pennsylvania's "coal country"—a region that was once the economic engine of the state but has long since declined due to the collapse of the industry. The composer assembles a libretto for the work combining text from primary source accounts of the lives of coal miners, her own interviews with descendants of mining families, various archival sources, and her own reflections on the impact of the coal industry on America today. The work is presented as a multi-media and site-specific performance, with full staging of the choir by a choreographer, an accompanying video installation, and staging and costumes designed to give the audience the visual impression of being immersed underground in a mine. The choir also organizes trips to meet and talk with former miners, public events for mining families to tell their stories, and a school curriculum for high school students to engage with the commission. The piece has since been performed with professional and semi-professional choirs on a worldwide tour.

2017: In Chicago, Illinois, two humanities organizations collaborate with choirs across the city to present the American premiere of a piece written for one thousand individual voices speaking and shouting. Unique to this performance, the organizers decide that they should assemble their massive choir from both established and ad hoc community choirs representing each of Chicago's fifty electoral wards, to attempt to represent the entire city in performance. In the words of the composer, the text for the piece builds on the sense of "community you get from being part of a crowd" (Lang 2014), in particular both the affirmation and loss of individuality that comes with collective expression. Participants rehearse separately throughout the summer under the coordination of local conductors in each ward and spend some time during each rehearsal with a

professional facilitator discussing their neighborhood's cultural resources and needs. Come October, the final performance takes place outdoors in the city's central park as part of a large arts and humanities festival.

Participation or Presentation?

I write these brief vignettes here in order to capture for my reader a sense of the social motivations behind these three choral musical events: the premiere performance of composer Reena Esmail's *Take What You Need* in Los Angeles (2016); the premiere performance of composer Julia Wolfe's *Anthracite Fields* in Philadelphia (2014); and the North American premiere performance of composer David Lang's *crowd out* in Chicago (2017—originally premiered in Berlin, London, and Birmingham in 2014). In reality, I must acknowledge that I was not personally involved in any of these premieres at the times of their creation. Instead, as I write this, I am sitting at my computer watching professionally filmed and edited videos of these performances, witnessing these events as a retrospective audience member and researcher.[2] I am conscious of the fact that, for each piece, I am watching the culmination of months to years of collaborative musical work—by composers to craft a score, conductors to rehearse it, singers to perform it, administrators to produce it, organizations to fund it, and a community to inform and rally behind it. Not only that, but the work of these different stakeholders was intimately linked to the public portrayal of each of these premiere performances. As both musical and social events, these performances not only provided platforms for the telling of community stories, but also for engaging community members in a collaborative process around the creation and/or performance of a new choral artwork alongside professional artists. Uniquely, the process of inviting community members to participate in creating a new

[2] I have, however, been involved in subsequent performances of *Take What You Need* and *Anthracite Fields,* as detailed in the following chapters.

musical work that was meant to reflect their stories, identities, or life experiences was equally important to the public portrayal of these premieres as the final musical product that participants created through their work together.

Yet as I watch, I am also conscious that I am viewing videos deliberately curated and archived to be presented to a future audience—an audience that will presumably value revisiting these performances as singular moments in musical history. The videos of these pieces, as well as these pieces' existence as musical scores and their numerous subsequent performances by other musical groups, all point toward their status as distinct musical works: discrete cultural and musical objects that are meant to be understood within the practice of Western classical concert music as works of art (Goehr 1992). In each piece, community participation was put on display for the benefit of an audience, both real and virtual. Additionally, the authorship of each of these pieces remains publicly attributed to the composers alone; the way I write about *Reena Esmail*'s *Take What You Need, Julia Wolfe*'s *Anthracite Fields,* and *David Lang*'s *crowd out* would rarely be questioned by Western classical art musicians, or probably indeed by these composers themselves.

This tension between "the work" of the mutual creators of these premieres and how their efforts culminated in the creation of "a work" of music underscores the dual identity of these musical performances as both *participatory* and *presentational.* In *Music as Social Life,* ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino distinguishes between these two modalities of musical performance, writing:

> Briefly defined, participatory performance is a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role. Presentational performance, in contrast, refers to situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music… (Turino 2008, 26)

Yet, as we have already seen in the three choral pieces introduced above, composers and their collaborators may choose to embrace participation and presentation to different degrees and

for different purposes within a single musical creation. These pieces remind us that participation and presentation are poles on a spectrum, and that the two may operate simultaneously and in "creative tension" (Camlin 2015) with each other within a performance event. In various ways, the creators of these pieces sought to create musical events that both offered expanded opportunities for participation and yet remained conventionally presentational in relation to the expected parameters of Western concert art music. While valuing the *work* of participants as an integral part of the piece, they also sought to create new *works*. Uniquely, what distinguished the aesthetic character of these premieres was the ways in which the musical and performative parameters of each piece compelled creative participants—composers, conductors, singers, musicians, artists, administrators, community members—to relate to each other in specific ways. These social relations, formed through their work together, were in each case conceptualized by those involved as an integral part of the music itself.

I introduce the new term *social practice composition* here to speak to the common interest in musical and social engagement that composers and their collaborators advocate for in these works, as well as the ways in which social engagement is implicated as part of the musical materials of each piece. In each of the three case studies that follow, I suggest that the tension between participation and presentation in these works points toward the need for an analytical language and research methodology that fully accounts for the role of the social within the expanded concept of "musical work" that these pieces and performances gesture towards. The three composers I consider in this research are admittedly not unrelated. All have studied at the Yale School of Music (Lang is also on faculty), while Lang and Wolfe are co-founders and close collaborators in the New York-based new music organization Bang on a Can (www.bangonacan.org). Yet while each composer has taken their own approach to engaging communities through creating new choral music, all three share a realization of how their compositional decisions consciously shaped the social relations formed

between musical participants in the performance of their works, in the service of issues of social importance to the communities with whom they collaborated. I contend that this shared feature of these works is worthy of a new terminology and dedicated study.

Why Community? Why Choir? Why Now?: Literature and Background

I do not limit my definition of social practice composition to pieces of music written for choral ensembles. Yet there is something unique about the social phenomenon of choral singing that I suggest has led to the genre of choral music becoming a particularly fertile ground for contemporary composers of Western art music experimenting with ways of accounting for the social within their compositional practice—specifically, with ways of creating community through choral performance. Stephen Connor, for example, coins the term "chorality" to speak to the "strange and powerful plural–singular that is the choral voice," noting how the sound of so many individuals joined together in speech or song conjures up a "fantasy of a collective voice-body that is not to be identified with any of the individuals who [comprise] it" (Connor 2016, 3, 5). Likewise, in the introduction to her edited collection *Chorus and Community,* musicologist Karen Ahlquist writes that "a chorus is not just one thing, but an adaptable idea of community that places serious attention to matters artistic at the center of its world" (Ahlquist 2006a, 10). Finally, conductor Paul Hillier, on the difference between solo and choral song, writes that "the chorus is more mysterious. It is a kind of *community* that exists to sing, that identifies itself by uttering harmonious sounds" (Hillier 2012, 64; emphasis original).

Connor, Ahlquist, and Hillier's sentiments highlight how, for many in the contemporary West, the image of the chorus has become *iconic* of community. Turino, drawing on the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, defines iconicity as "signs of resemblance" between a sonic, linguistic, or visual signifier (a sound; a word; an image) and the object or concept it signifies; to use

Turino's own example, a drum may sound like thunder and thus be thunder within a musical context because we perceive its likeness (Turino 2008, 7). Similarly, the choir does not merely represent the abstract idea of community but has come to bear an irreducible formal resemblance to an ideal of community in sound and appearance. The choir *is* a "plural-singular" or an "idea of community" because it looks and sounds like one.

Several questions follow logically at this point. What exactly do we speak of when we speak of community? How did the collective image of masses of people singing together in harmony come to signify community within Western society? How might we recognize community in sound and performance, or even consciously shape a performance in order to build or animate community? In seeking to understand how an ideal of community influenced the creation of the three works by Esmail, Wolfe, and Lang that I consider here, it is important first to understand how we arrived at this point—that an exploration of the nature of the community at the heart of the chorus was seen as a meaningful impetus for the creation of new musical art in the contemporary United States. In the sub-sections that follow, I outline a narrative literature review encompassing social theories of community, the social history of the Western choir as an institutional symbol of community, and how discourses of community are impacting American choral practice today.

Theories of Community in the Social Sciences and Ethnomusicology

Social scientists who study community conceptually often seem obliged to begin with an apology for the term's vagueness. In the sheer ubiquity of its colloquial usage, community "has proved to be highly resistant to satisfactory definition" (Cohen 1985, 11), the "sloppy manifestations" (Amit 2002, 1) of its definitional openness "leading many to question its usefulness" (Delanty 2018, 3) and others to declare it "downright dangerous" (Day 2006, 15). Yet at the same time, community persists as an organizing concept both in common parlance and research precisely

because of the strength of its multiple resonances. Many of us can readily recognize communities formed around, for example: boundaries of place (e.g., the neighborhood community center); nation, culture, and/or diaspora (the Chinese community in North Toronto); gender and/or sexual identity (the LGBTQ+ community); leisure interests (the wakeboarding community); solidarity with political and social causes (the environmentalist community); and professional relations (communities of practice). Whether we use it in reference to a geographically defined location, or the people who reside within that location, or the feeling of belonging that they share with each other, or that same feeling shared with others beyond a single locale, humans seem drawn to using community both to locate and to characterize the value of different parts of our social lives. While the specific characteristics, needs and issues that define the varied communities that each of us participate in are certainly vastly different, they share in common the important role that they play in structuring our social lives and personal identities. Graham Day refers to this dual function of community as both "descriptive" and "normative," noting how community comprises both a specific social formation as well as a set of ideals that call that social formation into being (Day 2006, 44). To study community, then, is both to study what a group social formation *is* and how that formation *is made*.

Genealogical accounts of the critical study of community frequently begin with the work of nineteenth-century sociologists Ferdinand Tönnies and Emile Durkheim. In his seminal work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (2001 [1887]), Tönnies sought to categorize the changing patterns of human association he observed over the course of the nineteenth century due to the Industrial Revolution and rapid urbanization of many parts of Europe. *Gemeinschaft* (often translated as community) referred to ties of close kinship that Tönnies associated with rural and agrarian life, and which he believed were in danger of being lost. *Gesellschaft* (often translated as society or association), by contrast, referred to more transactional, rationalized, and seemingly "modern" forms of human

collectivity being propagated by commerce and urban life. Gerard Delanty finds in Tönnies' writing the beginnings of what he characterizes as the "nostalgic" pole of writings on community—an implicit assumption that a once-robust sense of community located in the past is either "irretrievable" or must be actively "recovered," and that continues to inflect the meanings of community today (Delanty 2018, 22). Delanty contrasts this nostalgic pole with a utopian strain of writings on community, which he traces to the work of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim took issue with Tönnies for failing to account for possible new forms of positive social relations that could emerge through urban living. In his theory of mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim 1997 [1893]), Durkheim reversed the moral suggestiveness of Tönnies' own terms, suggesting that communal association based on shared labor and locale is merely "mechanical," while the individualization of labor and the self that is made possible by urban modernity leaves open new "organic" possibilities for human collectivity. In Durkheim's terms, community was something to aspire to through free and individual association and was an ideal perpetually located in the future. These early theorists make clear that the study of community has long been a focal point for discussing tensions between social cohesion and social change (Amit 2002) and allow us to see how particular connotations of community—particularly in its nostalgic and utopian guises—took root and continue to resonate in contemporary discourse and the popular imagination.

While the sociological traditions stemming from Tönnies and Durkheim emphasized the analysis of social structures grounded in geographical place, cultural approaches to the study of community since the late 1960s have rather stressed community's affective and symbolic dimensions. In particular, Victor Turner coined the term *communitas* to study the "anti-structural" experiences of people undergoing social transitions in ritual and ritualistic events—moments during the performance of cultural rituals when barriers of class and status seem to break down into what Turner called states of "liminality," offering participants ways of moving from one social position to

another (Turner 1969). Turner opened up the possibility of theorizing community as experiential, rather than physical, a theoretical move that opened the door to other critical responses. In *The Symbolic Structure of Community,* Anthony Cohen theorizes community as systems of symbolic barriers that social groups use to differentiate themselves from each other (Cohen 1985). Benedict Anderson also firmly decouples community from place in his concept of the *imagined community,* his term for how the rise of print capitalism in the nineteenth century allowed shared language and ideology to travel across large distances and unite people in ideas of nationhood (Anderson 1983). Each of these theorists saw community as a way to characterize how people experience and understand belonging, a development that has remained pertinent to critical perspectives on community today.

More recently, scholars have begun advocating for a return to an accounting of the specific social relations that form communities, in order to ground concepts of community in social activity. Gerard Delanty characterizes community as an "an open-ended system of communication about belonging" (Delanty 2016, 229); community is thus empirically locatable within individual communicative acts. Vered Amit similarly writes that community is "not merely symbol, but symbol as interpreted within event…proclamations of community [are] first and foremost claims of, and for, social engagement" (Amit 2002, 11). Delanty and Amit's concepts of community here are important as they move the critical study of community into close alignment with the study of performance—a key methodological touchstone of this dissertation which I elaborate on later in this introduction.

Special mention must also be made here of Kay Kaufman Shelemay's article "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music" (2011) as the principal piece of ethnomusicological scholarship to treat community in a critical conceptual framework. Arguing similarly to Amit and Delanty that community is best defined "in action" (Shelemay 2011, 364), Shelemay is interested in how musical activity serves as a form of communication and social organization that people understand as community. Shelemay writes: "A musical community is,

whatever its location in time or space, a collectivity constructed through and sustained by musical processes and/or performances...rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves" (Shelemay 2011, 364-365). Shelemay offers a framework for defining a continuum of possible musical communities, including communities of descent (e.g., musical teaching lineages), communities of dissent (e.g., protest musics), and communities of affinity (e.g., fans of musical genres).

Within the context of this study, I follow these scholars in defining community as a social formation characterized by a shared sense of belonging amongst members and sustained by the recurring deployment of collective behaviors, symbology, and memory by individuals, for other individuals, within specific events and locations for specific purposes. Furthermore, I suggest that the choral communities both created and maintained through the case study works I explore are primarily expressions of communities of affinity—affinity to choral singing, to particular choral organizations, and to the causes raised through the creation of these new choral artworks.

Genealogies of Community in Western Classical Choral Practice

That large groups of people singing together should be seen as a necessary expression of community in Western society was not an inevitable development. As Chester Alwes reminds us, "Contemporary Western notions of choral singing are a nineteenth-century invention" (Alwes 2012, 29). Alwes here refers to the rapid proliferation of choral societies and festivals throughout Europe during the long nineteenth century,[3] organizations which were frequently founded in support of "principles of utopian community, democracy and even moderate republicanism" arising out of the revolutionary and romantic ideals of the era (Butt 2001, 119-120). Prior to the nineteenth century in

[3] The long nineteenth century refers to the time period beginning with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 and ending with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

Europe, group singing of multi-part vocal compositions had been almost exclusively the preserve of professional singers in churches and courts, yet these new choral organizations were specifically comprised of members of the broader public and cultivated a spirit of musical amateurism (Applegate 2005, 126-127; Lajosi and Stynen 2015). To sing in a choir was not only to participate in making music, but to practice a particular form of individual agency through free association with other like-minded citizens, self-improvement through musical education, and nationalistic pride through the expression of shared culture. This condensation of meaning within the choir as cultural symbol was made possible by what Phillip Bohlman describes as a philosophical shift in the imagined source of musical inspiration: "Rather than descending from sacred origins, song now ascended through the singing of human subjects, aspiring…to the sublime" (Bohlman 2017, 47). Once music was understood as arising from the people, singing, particularly in choirs, became a way for people both to articulate their own identities in relation to history, culture, and class, and to recognize these aspects of themselves in others. The task of nineteenth-century amateur choral singing, then, was to make one a better modern citizen and to build a citizenry.

Many scholars have specifically used the term "community" to describe the broader socio-cultural project that these nineteenth-century European choral organizations undertook (Butt 2001; Ahlquist 2006a; Applegate 2013; Minor 2013). Yet what kind of community did their members envision, and on what terms were these choral communities formed? Despite often being founded on humanistic notions of universal community closely resembling Tönnies' *gemeinschaft*, nineteenth-century amateur choirs more often evinced a form of inter-personal association amongst members akin to *gesellschaft*. The "Choral Society" was not simply a frequent appellation (one still in use today), but an idealized social structure. Mixed-voice choral societies, for example, provided one of the first sanctioned public spaces for middle-class European men and women to collaborate on a common social endeavor, albeit through a gendered division of labor (Ahlquist 2006b). Choral societies kept

detailed records of membership, financial transactions, and governance, and in many European cities became the primary presenters of public concerts, fulfilling a social role not only of making music but of creating conditions of educated, middle-class civic life (Minor 2013, 116). Choral societies and festivals were also frequently explicitly nationalistic in their aims, and their efforts to foment nationalistic spirit through the dissemination of musical print material, as well as the actual physical meeting of choristers at inter-provincial festivals, have been characterized as examples of "imagined" and "embodied" communities respectively (Porter 1996; Mikusi 2006; Hambridge 2015; Leerssen 2015; Lajosi and Stynen 2015). Regardless of (or, perhaps, especially) whether or not they were recognized at the time through the self-governance of their own territory, many different European nationalities throughout the nineteenth century began to institutionalize their unique choral practices as a way to sing themselves into being (Lajosi and Stynen 2015).[4] Finally, choral societies offered a space for individuals to negotiate the increased secularization of the age. As the influence of the church waned, singing antiquated church polyphony or contemporary oratorios drawing on biblical narratives—two genres heavily favored by choral societies—represented an authorized way of engaging with the sacred in a public space, while the choral society's devotion to weekly rehearsals and reverence for the composer has been characterized as analogous to aspects of liturgy and worship (Butt 2001; Applegate 2013; Minor 2013; Palmer 2015).

This focus on a particular repertoire also served the purpose of providing a specific type of education, and not all music was up to the task. As Carl Friedrich Zelter—founder of the male-voiced Berlin *Liedertafel* and longtime director of the mixed-voice *Singakademie zu Berlin,* two organizations that were important early models for other similar choirs across German-speaking provinces—wrote at the time, "artistic activities can be considered an aspect of self-development

[4] Germany is the example par excellence in this regard. Not yet a nation state at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the proliferation of choral societies throughout Germany has received the greatest amount of scholarly attention due to their role in uniting different German-speaking provinces toward the goal of unification, which finally occurred in 1871.

only if they are directed with seriousness to a definite purpose" (qtd. in Applegate 2005, 145). Serious choral music invited contemplation, analysis, and rigor by drawing on Western contrapuntal and historical styles as interpreted through the genius of the composer, who was accorded a similar status to the public intellectual. As Ryan Minor comments, "to sing a fugue was to inhabit the edifying structures of music itself, to take part directly in the very craft of musical composition at its most rarified" (Minor 2013, 118). Community was thus an ideal that could be experienced aesthetically (Garratt 2010) through one's participation in a particular sound concept (the amateur chorus) and sonic structure (learned polyphony), with a specific repertoire of contemporary oratorios and historical polyphonic works that embraced these aesthetic principles serving as the gateway to "communal inheritance and symbolic ownership" of a specific choral musical culture that ensounded this ideal (Minor 2012, 5).

In the nineteenth-century United States, choral societies devoted to European classical music and organizationally modeled after Germanic and English counterparts similarly began to flourish, beginning with the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston in 1815 (Neff and Swafford 2015). While America in the previous century had developed its own tradition of singing schools—touring residencies where itinerant song-masters would teach music literacy and vocal technique applicable to hymn singing in church and school—the newer societies increasingly came to view these earlier domestic musical developments as vulgar and unrefined. As the editors of the 1822 *Handel and Haydn Society Collection of Church Music*—a publication designed to supplant the types of materials circulated by the singing schools—put it in their introduction, they could now:

> reflect with great pleasure upon the success which has attended [the Society members'] efforts. A visible improvement has taken place in the style of singing, and consequently in the taste of the community…Their combination as a Society, and their local situations, have given them an extensive and easy access to the

> fountains of Music in Europe, and have enabled them to cultivate with advantage an intercourse with gentlemen of taste and science in our own country. (Handel and Haydn Society 1822, iii-iv)

Similarly, the New York Tribune commented in a review on the New York Choral Society's first performance in 1873 how its membership reflected "a section of the community which manifests a better taste and warmer enthusiasm for music" than could be found in other choral organizations (qtd. in Krehbiel 1884, 63). Particularly through the work of educator and conductor Lowell Mason, the educational goals and aesthetic standards of the European-style choral society, enshrined in the performance of oratorios, became the foundation upon which choral leaders built a standardized institution of choral music education and performance in the United States (Smither 2000; Campbell and Higgins 2015).

This is not to say that other equally important and influential choral singing traditions did not arise in the United States in addition to the European classical tradition, such as choirs devoted to African-American spirituals, gospel music, and original compositions at historically black colleges and universities (Ward 2000) and on public university campuses (Chadwick 2011; Burke 2015), or shape note singing traditions such as the Sacred Harp (Cobb 2004). Yet it does point toward how a particular cultivated ideal of communal association, derived from nineteenth-century European humanism and nationalism, became aesthetically encoded in the sound and structure of Euro-American classical choral practice. What emerged in Europe primarily as a sonic and social articulation of humanistic community grounded in shared national identity (albeit with classist undertones) was translated in the United States as a disciplining of domestic culture through the medium of the voice. Grant Olwage finds in the sound and practice of what he terms "Victorian voice culture" a removal of the specificity of the voice as located in the body, whereby the cultural normativity of choral vocalism—and, by extension, choral composition—as white, European, middle-class, and educated became unmarked and universalized as taste (Olwage 2004; see also

Carter 2014). As Olwage writes: "Voice culture aimed to involve the singer in the cultivation of the voice so as to re-form the voice to conform to the middle-class idea of the vocally civilized… voice culture provided not just an argument for, but powerfully performed, the erasure of difference" (Olwage 2004, 207). This aesthetic ideal persists within contemporary American choral practice, and grappling with the contemporary ethical implications of how to account for social, cultural, and economic difference within the very sound and structure of choral music forms a large part of what is animating discussions of community in the choral field today.

Community and Choir Today

For the types of musical institutions highlighted above devoted to Western classical choral singing, the end of the nineteenth century brought a gradual shift away from a participatory ethos toward a focus on an increasingly highly skilled amateurism that aspired toward the technical refinement of professional musicianship (Finnegan 1989; Smith 2006; Minor 2012). Yet, beginning in the 1990s, artists and policymakers broadly across many disciplines began to find renewed interest in the rhetoric of democratic artistic participation. Large studies in the United Kingdom such as Anthony Everitt's *Joining In: An Investigation into Participatory Music* (1997) and François Matarasso's *Use or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* (1997) were among the first to offer empirical surveys of the psycho-social benefits of artistic projects that actively engaged people in making and celebrating their own culture, rather than consuming it; similar quantitative studies soon proliferated elsewhere in Europe and America as well (Kay 2000; Newman, Curtis and Stephens 2003). Such studies made visible decades of art, theatre, and music-making practices, variously described as participatory or community-engaged, that had been taking place away from the public eye since at least the 1960s. With the help of social scientists, artists engaged in these lines of work began framing outcomes of their projects around a language of social efficacy that was palatable to

public policy makers, arts councils, and private foundations (Bishop 2012). Spurred by greater public recognition and funding opportunities, artistic fields devoted to this type of work began to consolidate under banners such as community-engaged arts (Chapple and Jackson 2010; Hutcheson 2016), community music (Higgins 2012; Veblen et al 2013), community theatre (Howard 2011; Kuppers 2018), and creative placemaking (Markusen and Gadwa 2010). Administrators and curators too have increasingly sought to expand access to arts institutions perceived as inaccessible by diversifying cultural representation in programming and increasing pathways for reciprocity and collaboration with community members, efforts that are often framed around issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, relevance, sustainability, and cultural democracy (Graves 2005; Borwick 2012; Finkelpearl 2013). Overall, this broad social project across the arts is grappling with big-picture questions such as: Whose stories are we telling? Who is telling them? How are they being told? Whose voices have been left out?

Within the choral field, the meanings and implications of the term "community" have become a particular focal point for these types of questions both in research and practice. As a discipline founded on an ethos of community, Western classical choral organizations and those who lead and study them have broadly begun to ask what communities they serve through their work, and if and how that work needs to change in order to reflect diversifying social and cultural demographics or include communities that have been left off the cultural stage. Several practitioner-led publications that critically focus on the meaning of community in a choral context are worth highlighting. Krystal McKoy offers a structural model of the choral organization as an "ecosystem" of overlapping communities, with each successive circle of the core community (singers, staff), supporting community (patrons, scholars, civic partners), and the global community (digital presence, choral practice worldwide) meant to help organizational leaders ask whom they are engaging (McKoy 2013). Cindy Bell asks whether, in espousing principles of community yet

requiring singers to audition for community-based ensembles, choirs potentially violate a singer's fundamental democratic right to participation by restricting membership (Bell 2008). Liz Garnett defines choral conducting and singing as a "community of practice" and explores how the inherited traditions of choral conducting and pedagogy construct a particular identity and social formation of the Western classical chorister (Garnett 2009, 2017). Lastly, a recent thematic issue of Choral Journal—the premiere publication of the American Choral Director's Association—on "Social Justice and Choral Communities" profiled the work of choral directors working with LGBTQ+ choirs, prison choirs, choirs for people experiencing homelessness, cross-cultural choirs, and the impact of choral singing on patients with dementia (Boerger 2018). These publications demonstrate the contemporary currency of the term community amongst choral practitioners, its widely varying uses, and how discussions of community invariably intersect with issues of identity, social justice, and inclusivity.

Cultural and social studies of community choral singing in the fields of ethnomusicology and music education have similarly sought to offer portraits of how choral leaders and participants recognize and realize community in various contexts, often looking beyond Western classical choral practice. Amongst book-length studies, Ruth Finnegan provides the earliest ethnographic work, documenting how community choral societies in the 1980s in Milton Keynes in the United Kingdom served as "pathways" to a specific middle-class sociability modeled on an aspiration to classical musical professionalism (Finnegan 1989). André de Quadros offers a survey of choral ensembles across the world that he contends exemplify the "New Normal" of global choral practice in the twenty-first century: choral ensembles devoted to social justice causes such as anti-racism, peace-building, and reconciliation, celebrating identities variously defined by culture, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and physical (dis)ability, and preserving "traditional" cultural forms through global folklore festivals and competitions (de Quadros 2019). Caroline Bithell chronicles the

rise of the Natural Voice community choir movement in the United Kingdom since the early 1990s, arguing that the specific musical and structural characteristics of the "world song" repertoire that these groups espouse are particularly effective for fostering a global community of amateur singers (Bithell 2014). Karen Ahlquist's edited collection *Chorus and Community* (2006a) specifically takes community as a theoretical lens for ethnographic case studies of choral organizations in Tanzania, Russia, Sardinia, urban and rural America, and nineteenth-century Europe. Amongst article and chapter-length studies, prison choirs (Cohen 2009, 2010; Roma 2018), inter-generational choirs (Anderson and Sheets 2017; Beynon 2017), activist choirs (Leske 2016; Rickwood 2014, 2017), and inter-cultural choral projects (Romey, Sweet, and Wanyama 2009) have all been framed as visible touchstones of what community-building means to the choral field. While these many authors vary in the extent to which they treat the meaning of community critically within their writing, the implications of the term form an undercurrent running throughout all of this research and practice-based work, illustrating the plethora of issues that the discussion of community animates within the choral field.

Defining Social Practice Composition

In each of the case studies that comprise this dissertation, I investigate how institutions devoted to Western classical choral music, and the artists that write music for them, are attempting to reconceive community aesthetically in response to many of the issues raised in the discourses highlighted above, and in support of communities whose voices are not often heard, bodies are not often seen, or stories are not often told on the choral stage in this country. These case studies offer unique portraits of three composers developing their own toolboxes for consciously engaging and creating communities in sound and performance. Yet taken together, these studies also point towards a shared awareness amongst these composers and their collaborators for how these

premiere performances enacted specific ideals of human collectivity and connection, understood by those involved as acts of community-building. Throughout this dissertation, I employ the terminology of "social practice," drawn from the visual and performing arts, to refer to this principal shared feature of these compositions—a feature which distinguishes them from other (no less interesting) musical works in which community engagement or social issues have been addressed through topical, textual, or representational means.

To clarify: a social practice musical composition, uniquely, sets out to stage a human encounter; to effect a meeting of people through musical creation and performance; to influence the terms of that meeting through musical parameters; and to exhibit the artistic fruits of that meeting for an audience of some sort, even if just the participants themselves. In effect, a social practice composition materially creates community through musical participation. For the co-creators of these works (composers, conductors, choral participants, community members, administrators, funders), the ways that they consciously brought different groups of people together in a specific social encounter for a specific social purpose were as much a part of the artistic materials of these projects as the sounds that participants made together. In naming these works as examples of social practice composition, I attend analytically to how these inter-personal relations, formed and performed in and through music, were conceived as indivisibly part of the music itself.

Social Practice in the Visual Arts and Performance Studies

My own attempt to find a way to gain critical traction on the social character of the musical material in Esmail, Wolfe, and Lang's works has led to an extended exploration of "social practice" in the visual arts and performance studies (Jackson 2011; Atkins 2013; Courage 2017). The term social practice today encompasses a plethora of artists whose work embraces what critic Claire Bishop calls art's "social turn," which she characterizes as the ways in which "the intersubjective

space created through these [artistic] projects becomes the focus—and medium—of artistic investigation" (Bishop 2006, 179). Social practice artists are interested not only in encouraging social engagement through art, but also in social engagement as artistic form. As Cara Courage notes: "The process of social practice art is concerned with the creation of connections, intra-and inter-community, through the performative production of social encounters that may be ambiguous and indeterminant" (Courage 2017, 43). Social practice traces diverse lineages from the conceptual avant-garde of the 1960s including Fluxus and the Situationist International, public art-object practice, community artist placement initiatives of arts councils, corporations and government agencies, and community activism. Today, the precise form that social practice artists' work takes embraces numerous terminologies describing different yet related formal approaches, including: relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002); new-genre public art (Lacy 1995); community art (Kwon 2002; Hutcheson 2016); collaborative and dialogical art (Kester 2011, 2013); participatory art (Bishop 2012; Matarasso 2019); cooperative art (Finkelpearl 2013); and socially-engaged art (Helguera 2011; Thompson 2012; Wexler and Sabbaghi 2019).[5] Courage notes that, as social practice has developed its methods of social engagement, aesthetic strategies, and cultural politics from the 1990s through today, the field has seen a marked development toward "increasing public participation [progressing] from consultation, to participation, to co-production" as well as a changing role of the artist from "sole creator, to instigator and/or collaborator, to co-creator" alongside participants (Courage 2017, 48). This trajectory has also seen a corresponding evolution of how the artist conceives of their relationship and obligation to the community as part of artistic practice. Early social practice artists often imagined the public as an "object" to be worked on by the artist, while later works involved

[5] Most of these scholars are indeed in conversation with each other and recognize that they are offering slightly different lenses on what is a heterogeneous but mutually understood body of artistic work. One notable exception is the rift between Claire Bishop (2012) and Grant Kester's (2011) writing, where Bishop has sought to critique the ameliorating "feel-goodness" of certain "dialogic" projects that Kester advocates for, in favor of a more "antagonistic" approach to subject formation through art.

the community in greater depth as the "subject" of the work. Contemporary social practice artists now frequently conceive of the community as active co-producers of the artistic work, minimizing their own authorship of the artistic material and performance in favor of facilitating participants' artistic input and experience (Courage 2017, 47-48).

Atkins (2013) distinguishes two distinct formal approaches to social engagement in recent social practice artworks. On the one hand are short-term performative artworks that foreground participation and human relations during the limited duration of a public performance event, such as Rirkit Tiravanijah's public meals in art galleries intended to facilitate interaction amongst diners (1990–2019) (Gladstone Gallery 2020). On the other are sustained, long-term projects that attempt a particular social or ethical intervention; for example, Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses (1993–present) transformed a block of derelict shotgun houses in Houston over several years into a hub for local artistic creation by neighborhood residents that could "be an engine for social transformation" (Project Row Houses 2020). Claire Bishop illustrates some of the breadth of artistic activity that currently falls under the umbrella of social practice:

> Superflex's internet TV station for elderly residents of a Liverpool housing project (Tenantspin, 1999); Annika Eriksson's inviting groups and individuals to communicate their ideas and skills at the Frieze Art Fair (Do you want an audience? 2003); Jeremy Deller's Social Parade for more than twenty social organizations in San Sebastian (2001); Lincoln Tobier's training local residents in Aubervilliers, northeast Paris, to produce half-hour radio programs (Radio Ld'A, 2002); Atelier Van Lieshout's A-Portable floating abortion clinic (2001); Jeanne van Heeswijk's project to turn a condemned shopping mall into a cultural center for the residents of Vlaardingen, Rotterdam (De Strip, 2001-2004); Lucy Orta's workshops in Johannesburg (and elsewhere) to teach unemployed people new fashion skills and discuss collective solidarity (Nexus Architecture, 1995-); Temporary Services' improvised neighborhood environment in an empty lot in Echo Park, Los Angeles (Construction Site, 2005); Pawel Althamer's sending a group of "difficult" teenagers from Warsaw's working-class Brodno district (including his two sons) to hang out at his retrospective in Maastricht (Bad Kids, 2004); Jens Haaning's producing a calendar that features black-and-white photographic portraits of refugees in Finland awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications (The Refugee Calendar, 2002). (Bishop 2006, 178)

Critical perspectives on social practice in the art world are principally concerned with the form and ethics of inter-personal encounter: how artists use their chosen media to bring people into relation with one another within the artistic project (Bourriaud 2002; Thompson 2012); who is actually welcomed to participate (Finkelpearl 2013; Matarasso 2019); the "dialogic" process of such encounters between communities with different backgrounds (Kester 2011); the relationship between community needs and public consumption of art (Kwon 2002; Hutcheson 2016); and how these encounters may reinforce or disrupt larger issues of social justice (Helguera 2011; Wexler and Sabbaghi 2019) and personal identity formation (Bishop 2012). Such an enfolding of aesthetic and ethical questions seeks to treat such artworks in artistic terms, specifically to avoid a scholarship of efficacy that treats art-making solely in terms of social outcome (Bishop 2012; Courage 2017). This is not to say that questions of social outcome in these types of projects are not equally important to consider, but rather that they require a different framing and research methodology than questions of form and meaning. Throughout the case study chapters, the principal element of this art-critical scholarship I embrace is a writing that approaches these musical works on the terms they were created—as the outcomes of a collaborative musical art-making practice in which the "musical work" itself was conceived as indivisibly social.

Social Practice Composition

These examples above illustrate an existing understanding of what social practice means in relation to art and performance, illuminating possible points of contact with an emergent musical social practice. Throughout this study, I use the term *social practice composition* to speak to how musical co-creators (composers, performers, participants, administrators, and funders alike) consciously employ ideals about human relationality and community, as well as actual inter-subjective relations composed into the score and realized in performance, as part of the substance and intended

meaning of the musical work. Notably, I do not contend that the creators of these works consciously thought of themselves as operating within a shared artistic paradigm with the social practice arts, or with each other. Rather, in naming a shared aspect of artistic practice in these works and drawing on scholarship on similar artistic developments in another field, I aim to use these case studies to investigate the notion of community-building through music that these performances animated and how such social narratives are impacting the fields of contemporary Western art music composition and classical choral performance in America today.

To reconfigure my own definition in Turino's terms introduced earlier: *social practice composition signifies how musical co-creators consciously choose to present musical participation in the creation and performance of a musical artwork, and how participation fundamentally alters the presentation of musical art*. In working together, artists and participants alike invariably take up issues of social justice, equity, representation, and access that are important to the communities with whom they work and seek to do something about these issues through musical art-making. Social practice is rarely, if ever, ethically neutral. In foregrounding the social, artists and their artworks inevitably take on political stances that shape the types of idealized communities they attempt to create through their work.

Consciousness about some form of social practice within the field of Western art music is certainly not confined to the choral arts, or even to composed music. To briefly illustrate: a proper history of the "social turn" in Western art music might properly encompass such developments as performer-mediated indeterminacy in the music of John Cage (Coons 2017), participatory environmental compositions of R. Murray Schafer (e.g., the *Wolf Project*; Crossman 2017; Jaeger 2019), spatial relationships and improvisational communication between performers in the works of Pauline Oliveros (e.g., *Wind Horse*; Oliveros 1989), and certain practices in site-specific music (Gottschalk 2016). It could also include more recent works such as the community operas of Jonathan Dove and Orlando Gough for Glyndebourne Festival (Glyndebourne 2013; 2016), the

"city symphonies" of Tod Machover (MIT Media Lab 2017), and interactive sound installations by artists such as Janet Cardiff (e.g., *Experiment in F# minor*, *40 Voice Motet;* Cardiff and Miller 2021). Finally, areas in which musical scholars are recently beginning to engage with art critical literature on social practice include within critical improvisation studies (Born, Lewis, and Straw 2017), as well as scholarship on the performance of indigenous intercultural art music in Canada (Robinson 2020).

A full accounting of such alternative lineages of the social in Western art music would certainly be timely project yet is necessarily outside the bounds of this study. I confine myself, instead, to a particular account of how three contemporary American composers closely aligned their compositional practice with the tenets of artistic social practice in recent works for community chorus. Throughout, I am concerned less with proving a new category of musical aesthetics in Western classical art music than in using the new term of social practice composition to explore issues of professional practice in composition and choral music. I ask: in attempting to engage communities through the creation of new choral compositions, what did the artists and participants who made these works do*,* musically and socially, and what can we learn from their doing?

Aims and Methods

This study has two principal aims: first, to document how three composers and artistic community organizations collaborated to address community needs through the creation and/or performance of new social practice choral compositions; and second, through these three case studies, to offer a framework for the future study and practice of social practice choral composition in America today. To put these aims another way: this study attends both to choral composition as a community-building practice, and to community-building as a compositional practice. With respect to the former, I ask what social narratives and personal motivations drive artists and communities to engage in such projects. Why is the creation of new choral music seen as an effective way to engage

with and build community? What does community actually mean in different choral and community contexts? My questions with respect to the latter have more to do with musical structure, style, and substance. How do composers employ sound and performance in an attempt to create and configure human relationships—to materially create community—across time, space, and place? How do certain types of images, texts, or sounds lend themselves more readily to this task? What are the social implications of these artistic decisions about musical community-building?

In seeking to answer these questions, I contend that an analytical study of these—and similar, future—social practice choral works must therefore necessarily also be a study of the "social work" of the chorus: the relationships formed between professional artists and community participants; the narratives about social justice, participation, and equity which surround their music-making; and the role and impact of these collaborations within the communities they create, participate in, and sustain. Writing about a musical art-making practice that foregrounds its own social materiality presents an equal opportunity to practice a scholarship that does the same

Ethnomusicological Methods for Research in Choral Studies

Aiming to capture both the musical and social dimensions of the social practice choral works I study here has led me on four-year-long engagement with ethnomusicological literature and research methods. Specifically, this study contributes to a small but significant body of research on the "ethnomusicology of Western art music" (Nooshin 2014; see also Wachsmann 1981; Herndon 1988; Kingsbury 1988; Nettl 1995; Born 1995; Stock 1997; Shelemay 2001; Cottrell 2004). While I remain in my professional work primarily a choral conductor and composer, this study is ethnomusicological in that, following Bruno Nettl, I "[take] into account both the music itself, as sound, and how it interacts with other things that people do" (Nettl 2005, 7), such as compose, think about, talk about, perform, organize, advocate for, and gather around music.

By studying sound in tandem with the actions and attitudes of those who are making it, ethnomusicologists seek to understand how musical sounds and performances are created and understood within specific social and cultural contexts, and the reciprocal relationships between sound structures and social structures (Feld 1984)—how sound reflects and constructs society, and vice versa. Thus, standard contemporary ethnomusicological methodology has remained closely aligned with the research paradigm of interpretive anthropology which, following anthropologist Clifford Geertz, contends that the analysis of culture is "not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 1973, 5). Ethnomusicologists view musical sound and activity as both enmeshed within and constitutive of socio-culturally contingent patterns of meaning; in this research paradigm, sound and performance not only reflect meaning, but also create, negotiate, and contest socially embedded meaning. Accordingly, while each of the case studies I offer here will also contextualize these works within their composer's style and output and address aspects of musical-technical construction, my central questions primarily concern meaning: what meanings of community did musical creators and participants attach to their work together, and why did they view this particular interpretation as important?

Methodologically, this study follows others in the field of ethnomusicology as an ethnography of musical performance (Herndon and McLeod 1980; Béhague 1984, 1992; Waterman 1990; Erlmann 1996; Kisliuk 1998; Seeger 2004; Madrid 2009; Buchanan 2016), a research approach that emerged in conversation with the field of performance studies, in particular the interdisciplinary work of anthropologist Victor Turner and theatre studies scholar Richard Schechner (Turner 1982; Schechner 1985). Ethnographers of performance understand performance itself as a theoretical lens through which to analyze human social behavior; they are interested not only in those artistically-heightened activities which members of a given society might bracket off from everyday life as "a performance"—such as a concert, a play, a dance, a ritual—but also in everyday human action as

itself a form of performance. As Deborah Kapchan writes, "Performances are aesthetic practices—patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment—whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group identities… [Performance plays] an essential (and often essentializing) role in the mediation and creation of social communities." (Kapchan 1995, 479). Kapchan's attention to how social structures, such as community, are made manifest through the interpenetration of the aesthetic and the social in performance remains an important theoretical premise. It is through performance—through aestheticized human social action—that communities recognize their own ideas and values and thus themselves, and through repeated performances that such ideas come to structure or define a community.

Throughout this dissertation, I am concerned with the social and musical performance of community, as a socio-cultural ideal that the co-creators of these three case-study musical works sought to perform through the process of creating them. In invoking performance as a theoretical lens, I am interested both in the premiere performances of these works as they may be understood in a conventional sense as "a performance" of "a musical work," but also in the entirety of the social action leading to their realization—"the work" of all musical collaborators. I contend that the degree of attention the creators of these works consciously paid to realizing community through musical performance is worthy of a new distinction within the field of composition, a distinction I make by introducing the term *social practice composition*. I choose to focus on the ways this ideal has played out in the choral field in the early twenty-first century United States because this represents my own area of expertise, while also acknowledging there is something unique about the social character of choral music-making that has led to it becoming a site for this type of compositional development.

In each of the following case studies, I employ a variety of research methods characteristic of contemporary ethnomusicological work, including: on-site participant observation of choral rehearsals; oral history interviews with composers, creators, administrators, and other artistic

personnel; semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and online surveys with choral participants; analysis of primary sources including musical scores, audio-visual recordings of performances, funding records, press releases, and media reviews; and participating as a performer in subsequent performances of these works. The precise use of these methods to explore each work is detailed as they arise in each chapter. Throughout my writing, I foreground the opinions and recollections of creative partners and participants as they recall their work together to create these performances. Alongside the voices of my interlocutors, I offer my own analyses of how their recollections on the meaning of their work together relate to the sounds and sights they produced, as documented by the musical scores and video/audio recordings of these performances. I also make selective use of performative writing, particularly through introducing each case study with a narrative vignette that places my reader in the frame of experiencing a performance of the piece at hand. Following Anthony Seeger, I write these vignettes in the ethnographic present tense, not to generalize about what it might have been like to experience these works in performance but rather to emphasize the singularity of individual past performances (Seeger 2004, xvii) and their function as participatory and immersive events.

In undertaking this study, I consciously acknowledge my own insider position within the fields of choral conducting and composition and aim to offer a commentary on the broad and growing resonances of the idea of community within these fields, as demonstrated by the ways in which creators and participants evoked community in preparing the premiere performances of these pieces. Notably, I do not claim that these case studies provide generalizable insight into the cultures and practices of the organizations and communities who premiered these works; these organizations and their singers were not, strictly speaking, the dedicated object of my study. Rather, I suggest that I offer here a thematic ethnography of one aspect of the culture of contemporary, amateur, Western classical choral practice in the United States, and that my own role as an interpreter has been to

mediate between my dual status as a privileged insider in that choral practice generally and as a participant-observer of specific choral events and performances.

Rationale as a Dissertation in Choral Conducting

This dissertation takes a novel approach to research in the field of choral conducting by employing ethnomusicological literature and methods as foundational. My own engagement with the field of ethnomusicology comes as an attempt to find a methodology that provides the necessary critical apparatus to account for the object of my study—the growth and practice of social practice composition within the field of choral music in the United States over the past ten years—as well as growing consideration amongst conductor-scholars of the use and import of ethnographic and performance-oriented research methods (e.g., Moy 2015; de Quadros 2019; Palmer, Traill, and Ponchione-Bailey 2020). By necessity, this is both a broad and a narrow inquiry, comprising a theoretical proposal for the recognition of a new genre of compositional practice and grounding that proposal in empirical case studies of the creation and performance of specific new choral works. This is a study of a cultural phenomenon (social practice composition in choral music) and three cultural artifacts (individual pieces/performances of music) that exemplify that phenomenon, and thus merits a cultural approach to research.

Such an approach requires a shift in thinking from how conductors have traditionally conceived of their roles and responsibilities in relation to both the musical score and the musicians within their ensembles. Much of the discipline and education of the Western choral conductor continues under the "textual" paradigm of mid-twentieth-century musicology (Cook 2011), as well as the influence of professional orchestral conducting. Conductors are taught to analyze musical scores for the intimate theoretical relations between their constituent parts, to reveal the composer's intent as encoded within the printed score and sound itself, to communicate that intent to our

singers (both gesturally and verbally) so that we can recreate it, and to attend to the numerous technical features of our singing that will make such a re-creation stylistically accurate. Each of these attitudes toward music approaches the musical work as a fixed text that can be decoded by expert knowledge. This textual way of conceiving of musical knowledge persists within scholarly research produced by Western choral conductors[6] despite the shift in some areas of musicology from "a text-based to a performance-based understanding of music" (Cook 2011, 185), the persistent attention in the field of music education to social constructivist learning paradigms (e.g., Freer 2008), and calls within the choral field itself for greater attention in conductor training to the social aspects of musical leadership in relation to contemporary issues (Durrant 2018; Berger 2019). While these are just three brief examples, each in turn highlights ways that the research and art of our time is moving towards a fuller consideration of the social dimensions of knowledge construction. Musicologist Nicolas Cook outlines the influence that this epistemological shift has had on those who study Western art music:

> …instead of seeing musical works as texts within which social structures are encoded, we see them as scripts in response to which social relationships are enacted. The object of analysis is now present and self-evident in the interactions between performers, and in the acoustic trace that they leave. To call music a performing art, then, is not just to say that we perform it; it is to say that through it we perform social meaning. (Cook 2011, 193)

Throughout the case studies that follow, I, too, remain interested in the scripts and meanings that composers and participants craft in the process of creating community together through choral performance, and how those musically encoded scripts were interpreted as meaning "community" by those who willingly engaged in their creation.

[6] This admittedly generalized statement is nonetheless corroborated by a brief overview of Chorus America's Research Memorandum Series, dominated almost exclusively by titles such as The Choral Works of [composer name]. This is not to say that these are not valuable publications, only that they reinforce the textual paradigm of the musical work and the attendant role of the musical analyst. See https://www.chorusamerica.org/publications/research-memorandum-series?page=1.

As practitioners uniquely situated at the intersection of music performance, musicology, and music education, choral conductors must respond to these paradigm shifts in other disciplines in order to begin to understand the social meanings that we, too, create through our work. Such a response can only serve to broaden our conception of our own professional practice, and the responsibilities of the roles we assume equally as performers, scholars, and teachers. This is not to say that common-practice musical analysis of Western art music is unnecessary, but, perhaps, that it is no longer always enough. Conductors make music with people; embracing research methods within our own area of study that foreground the relationships made with those people during mutual acts of music-making represents one step toward acknowledging this.

Summary of Chapters

This introductory chapter has served as a broad literature review, introducing the concept of social practice composition in the choral arts in relation to social theories of community, a social history of the Western choir as a symbol of community, and contemporary discourses of community engagement and social practice in the visual and performing arts. The case studies that follow, in differing ways, each examine one choral musical project that exhibited tenets of what I define as social practice composition. In particular, my analysis focuses on the different meanings of community that emerged through these projects, and how those meanings emerged through the decisions about sound, performance, and human social relationality made by composers and their collaborators. Although the co-creators of these works each professed the importance of building community through their work, their visions for what community was and the ways in which they sought to create it were all markedly distinct. Each of these case studies thus seeks to be both a musical and a social analysis, examining how creative participants in these projects created and recognized different meanings of community in musical sound and performance, and revealing how

contemporary Western choral practice contributes to the broad resonances of community in the United States today.

I suggest to my reader that these case studies could be considered as separate yet thematically linked article-length studies, framed by an overarching concern with how community is created and perceived in the Western classical choral field through acts of musical composition and performance. Chapter Two explores composer Reena Esmail's work with the Skid Row, Los Angeles-based musical service organizations Street Symphony and Urban Voices Project to create *Take What You Need,* a work for strings and double choir that requires the participation of both professional and community performers. Drawing on literature from medical ethnomusicology, community music and music therapy (Koen, Barz, and Brummel-Smith 2008; Stige 2016; Higgins and Willingham 2017), I characterize the style of community imagined in this piece as a community of healing and examine how Esmail encoded healing-oriented musical facilitation practices within the sound and staging of her work. Chapter Three turns to composer Julia Wolfe's *Anthracite Fields,* an hour-long oratorio on the thematic history of coal mining in Pennsylvania's coal region commissioned and premiered by the Philadelphia-based Mendelssohn Club community choir. Building on ethnomusicologist Carol Muller's concept of archival composition (Muller 2002), I examine how Wolfe constructs a sonic archive of signifiers of coal mining culture, and how community choristers involved in the work's premiere responded to those signifiers as authentic engagement with an othered cultural community. Chapter Four documents the American premiere of composer David Lang's *crowd out* for one thousand community participants, organized and produced by the Chicago Humanities Festival and Illinois Humanities. In particular, I characterize the social relations between participants which Lang encodes into his score, as well as the social purpose of the performance specifically endorsed by the organizers of the American premiere, as an example of community as social capital (Putnam 2000). In the concluding Chapter Five, I use

examples from the preceding case studies to ask larger disciplinary questions regarding the practice, study, and evaluation of social practice composition in an effort to chart a broader recognition of this work and encourage its development in sustainable, responsible, and critically reflective ways.

I anticipate that different parts of this study may resonate in different ways with a varied community of readers—composers, conductors, musicologists, music educators, and arts/music administrators alike. As an interdisciplinary study, I suggest several lenses through which readers with different backgrounds may view and understand the import of this research. For the composer, I provide snapshots of current methods of engaging communities through composition in the choral arts, explore best practices in community-engaged art and music making, and make an argument for the growth of this practice. For the choral conductor, I offer a model for a type of socio-musical analysis, based on ethnomusicological research methods, that I contend is necessary for understanding the range of possible social meanings of these works, and thus the conductor's interpretive responsibility in relation to the participants with whom they perform. For the (ethno)musicologist, I participate in the call for greater scholarly attention to musical community construction (Shelemay 2011). For the music educator, I contribute to conversations about equity, justice, and inclusion in participatory music practices, particularly those that are located outside institutions of formal learning. Finally, for the analyst or theorist of music or art, I argue that the human relationships formed, strengthened, and mediated by musical creation and performance are worthy of investigation in their own right—worthy, indeed, as part of the ontology of "the music itself."

Conclusion

This is a study of both people and music, as well as a study of *people as music* and *music as people*. Specifically, it is a study of three contemporary American composers who became conscious

of this idea over the past ten years and foregrounded it in three recent choral works they wrote with, for, or about a community. Together, these works demonstrate how large-scale, civic, choral musical projects both reveal and shape our understanding of what it means to be in community with one another in the twenty-first century urban United States. If "choir" has indeed become iconic of "community" today, then the choir has necessarily also become a critical site where the meaning of community is imagined, contested, and maintained. Communities of passionate musical creators have certainly formed around and through these works, and their performances have also contributed to important conversations within the broader communities that support and sustain their work. Yet—and, perhaps, most importantly—it was through creating and performing these pieces that many of their co-creators recognized community as an emergent property of their work together. In these pieces, community both *became* and was *known* through the creation of new choral music. Or, perhaps, a more apt turn of phrase would be to say that, through these works, community was *composed*.

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNITY AS HEALING:
REENA ESMAIL'S *TAKE WHAT YOU NEED* IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

"We sang, nearly shouting the lyrics, the wind clipping at our voices. They say song can be a bridge, Ma. But I say it's also the ground we stand on. And maybe we sing to keep ourselves from falling."
—Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2018, 125).

It is mid-afternoon on a Friday in December 2019, and the gymnasium at the Midnight Mission in the Skid Row neighborhood of Los Angeles, California is packed with people for the fifth-annual Messiah Project concert.[7] At the front of the gym, the Street Symphony orchestra and chamber choir, all professional musicians from around Los Angeles, are seated in concert formation as if on stage in any other concert hall. Intermingled among the professional choristers are members of the Urban Voices Project, a community choir based in Skid Row comprised of singers who are either currently living or who have lived in a condition of homelessness. Alongside several hundred other audience members, I am crowded into one of the many rows of white plastic folding chairs facing the de-facto stage, packed so tightly together that there is little room for our knees. To my right sits a professor from the Colburn School of Music; to my left, a person who is currently unemployed and taking shelter at the mission. Throughout the gymnasium, the story is much the same; while some audience members travelled in from well-off suburbs of Los Angeles, others walked around the corner or down the hall.

The concert program is structured around excerpts of George Frederic Handel's oratorio *Messiah*, but that is certainly not all that happens musically. Produced each year by Street Symphony, a musical service organization that presents concerts and musical workshops for people experiencing homelessness and incarceration in the Greater Los Angeles area, the Messiah Project also

[7] This vignette is based on my own attendance at the 2019 Messiah Project concert. Since the time of writing this chapter, Reena Esmail has also released footage from the 2016 premiere performance (Esmail 2020).

prominently features other artists in a variety of musical styles. A processional by the Ashe Asé Drummers from the Heart, a drumming group based in Skid Row, leads into a special guest appearance by Las Colibri, an all-female mariachi ensemble, that has the crowd on their feet. The Urban Voices Project also performs a set of their own, featuring a new song that the choir members have collaboratively written themselves. In another poignant moment of programming, Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" is followed by a rendition of Leonard Cohen's song *Hallelujah*. Finally, two singers from the Urban Voices Project have the opportunity to sing solos—one of them sings a Handel aria, the other a Diana Ross song—as the culmination of several months of vocal coachings provided by Street Symphony musicians. Over the past five years, the Messiah Project concert has garnered considerable public recognition for this meeting of social and musical worlds, for being a place where, in the words of Street Symphony founder and concertmaster Vijay Gupta, music can "bridge the gap" between parts of Los Angeles society that rarely come into contact with each other, much less voluntarily (Gupta 2019ab; see also Bain 2016; Swed 2016; Ross 2018; Cirisano 2019). Indeed, we have all chosen to be here today because of the music. And now, one hour into the show, we are all about to sing together.

The melody and words for the next piece on the concert—composer Reena Esmail's *Take What You Need*—are printed in our program, but we quickly realize that we do not need the score. One of the professional singers comes out from the choir and takes her place in front of the orchestra at a microphone. Everything she sings, she tells us, we are to sing back to her, one phrase at a time. Conductor Zanaida Robles raises her arms, and the strings enter tenderly—a soft bed of C major harmonies in slowly undulating triplets. The soloist begins. "Take a moment," she sings, the simple phrase set to a stepwise ascending pattern of three pitches. We dutifully echo, supported in our efforts by the Urban Voices Project choir members who also sing along with us. "Take a breath," she sings, and we do, and sing back to her. Phrase by phrase the melody unfurls, always in

call-and-response, each fragment beginning with the same word, asking us to "take" something reassuring. Certain sections of the melody cause us some problems. One particular phrase, set to the words "take joy," soars up to a high G flat, while the middle section of the chorus subtly modulates upwards by a semitone. Yet as the soloist sings the final words of the chorus— "take what you need"—the music comes back to rest solidly in C major. A sense of calm and repose takes over the room. "Take what you need," we sing together. Twice more the soloist sings to us "take what you need," and "take what you need" we reply to her and to each other. "Take what you need," she concludes.

The strings segue into an instrumental interlude while an older man stands up from the front row and approaches the microphone. As the strings continue their accompaniment, he tells us his life story. Incarcerated for several decades, he was finally released this past year, and credits the social connections he made through Street Symphony's Music for Change program with helping him on his journey towards recovery and re-integration into broader society. The energy in the room seems to shift as he speaks; many in the audience have experienced similar life events, and it is hard not to be moved by his sincerity. People cheer and applaud as he finishes speaking, not just politely but with real affirmation. The vocal soloist takes the microphone once more and leads us into a reprise of the chorus, now accompanied by more elaborate choral and string writing. Our own singing is stronger this time, more confident and assured as we have sung this music before, but also changed by the story we have heard.

One more speaker tells a story from his life after incarceration, and we sing the chorus one final time before our performance of *Take What You Need* concludes. I write "our performance" here because, as has become clear over the past fifteen minutes, a performance of *Take What You Need* could not take place without the dialogue between two performing groups—in our case, between an ensemble of professional and community musicians and an audience of some of Los Angeles' most

and least affluent citizens. Our performance acquires meaning through this interaction, through the feeling of cooperation between everyone in the room and the sense of vulnerability encouraged by the community members who tell their stories.

Take What You Need was commissioned by Street Symphony in 2015 and first performed in concert on the 2016 Messiah Project by the Street Symphony orchestra and chamber choir, the Urban Voices Project, and the assembled audience. Since then, it has featured on the annual concert each year but has also been taken up in dozens of performances by choirs around the United States (Esmail 2019). While the piece has often featured in concerts speaking to issues of homelessness (Challenge the Stats 2019; Fishburn 2019) it has also been programmed in the context of other social issues, including education equity and mental health (Morse Chorale 2017; Pope 2019a). Part of the piece's success in speaking to a multiplicity of social causes is due to the non-specific nature of its libretto. Rather than creating a work specifically on the topic of homelessness, Esmail set out instead to craft a shared performance experience for professional musicians and amateur singers and storytellers from the community—in effect, a performance of "community" itself. As Esmail writes in the score: "Ask members of the community to tell their stories. This is where Take What You Need becomes about and for your community" (Esmail 2016a, 9).

Throughout this chapter, I ask how Esmail, alongside her musical collaborators in Skid Row, performed and continue to perform a particular vision of community through the process of creating *Take What You Need* and their ongoing annual presentations of the piece. In particular, I contend that close attention to Esmail's compositional process—informed by an analysis of the score, her pre-compositional materials, interviews with Esmail and other key artists, and observations of performances of the work—reveals an understanding of community as a site of personal and social healing, and an understanding of collaborative music-making as the means through which that healing can be accomplished. I draw my own understanding of healing primarily

from ethnographic literature in medical ethnomusicology and qualitative literature in community music therapy, both of which emphasize the cultural construction of healing within specific community settings, rather than healing as bio-medical fact (Koen, Barz, and Brummel-Smith 2008; Stige 2016). Yet this chapter is intended not only as a study of a community-building or health-promoting musical practice, but also as an argument about choral repertoire and composition—about a specific piece of choral music and the process of creating it. As an example of a compositional orientation which I define as social practice composition, this present case study demonstrates how a desire to build community influenced one composer's compositional methods and style, and how she used musical means to enact a particular idea of community as healing in sound and on stage.

Although *Take What You Need* continues to be performed in other communities across the United States, my own concern remains first and foremost with the place and purpose of the piece within its community of origin—the Urban Voices Project choir, Street Symphony, and the neighborhood of Skid Row. Through my brief fieldwork in this community, related last in this chapter, I ask: what has this piece meant to this community, and what does it continue to mean? How does the piece serve to represent, or not represent, the members of the community? How do the inter-personal relationships performed through the piece contribute to an understanding of community as a site of healing?

Take What You Need began in Skid Row. So that is where this chapter begins as well.

"About and for" Skid Row: Street Symphony and the Urban Voices Project

Formally designated as the neighborhood between Third, Seventh, Main, and Alameda Streets, Los Angeles' Skid Row district is a glaring contradiction amidst the affluence of a global city. To the north and west, the architecture of Little Tokyo and the downtown Financial District testify

to the city's history. To the east, young professionals flock to the warehouse-chic breweries and galleries of the Arts District or browse upscale boutiques at a glitzy new mall alarmingly named "The Row." To the south, the Fashion District tantalizes shoppers with the possibility of scoring designer labels at bargain-bin prices. Yet an imaginary border seems to exist at the intersections of these four main roads, after which the shuttered buildings and tents lining the sidewalks multiply rapidly. Skid Row is simply the most visible sign of what the Los Angeles Times Editorial Board (2018) has called the "national disgrace" of the homelessness crisis currently engulfing the entire city, as estimates from the year 2019 place the total number of people experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles around sixty thousand (Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority 2019a).

Since at least the 1870s, the Skid Row neighborhood has been home to some of the city's poorest and most vulnerable citizens. The name Skid Row arose out of the term "skid roads," originally referring to the wooden skids laid down by loggers on roadways used for hauling logs to port, but which came to refer more generally to districts featuring cheap places for lodging, sustenance and entertainment that would spring up to service men of the industry. The arrival of the railroad in Los Angeles in the 1870s to just east of the downtown core produced a neighborhood with a similar demographic. While traditionally these railroad workers were at least semi- or seasonally employed, the proportion of unemployed workers in the district skyrocketed throughout the Great Depression, as many displaced farm workers or those who chose to abandon their families sought refuge in Skid Row (Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce 2008). Historically, the prevalence of single men in the neighborhood led to the development of low-cost but poorly maintained single-occupancy-hotel room accommodations. Beginning in the 1960s, many of these hotel developments were demolished under a new city ordinance cracking down on building codes, further exacerbating the problem of affordable housing and leading to increased presence of tent "encampments." While the 1970s brought a new awareness of this problem and the city worked to

preserve some of these accommodations, ordinances against encampments, rising rents, and gentrification throughout the city during the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century have continued to push Los Angeles residents onto the streets (Gibbons 2018). Residents who resort to living on the street in other parts of the city are sometimes even forcibly relocated to Skid Row by police, and numerous examples of homeless and mentally ill residents of Los Angeles being "dumped" in Skid Row by police and hospitals have been documented (Green 2018). As of 2019 the official statistic documenting people living in a condition of homelessness in Skid Row alone stands at 4757 (Los Angeles Homeless Service Authority 2019b).

In 2011, Los Angeles Philharmonic violinist Vijay Gupta founded Street Symphony, an organization dedicated to presenting concerts within Skid Row and making music alongside the neighborhood's residents. Gupta's vision was not only to build opportunities for professional musicians and community members alike to build relationships with each other through sharing music, but also to use music as a pathway for residents to share their experiences of homelessness and incarceration, two social issues most affecting residents of Skid Row. Street Symphony provides a concert experience that is often inaccessible due to economic disparity by bringing professional musical performances into vulnerable communities such as Skid Row and Los Angeles county jails. Through these concert activities, the organization offers opportunities for Los Angeles residents from different socio-economic classes to meet through a shared musical experience. In 2015, Street Symphony presented the first Messiah Project concert at the Midnight Mission, a now-annual event that has become one of their flagship initiatives. In 2018, Gupta was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship and left the Philharmonic to pursue Street Symphony as a full-time endeavor, while the organization has continued to expand its activities beyond Skid Row to working with homeless and incarcerated persons around Greater Los Angeles. Street Symphony's current programs include weekly and monthly workshops and performances in collaboration with the Weingart Center re-

entry programs for parolees and probationers, People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) affordable housing facilities, and numerous incarceration facilities throughout Los Angeles County (Street Symphony 2021).

Another important organization involved in the creation of *Take What You Need* was the Urban Voices Project. Founded in 2015 by music director Leeav Sofer and Wesley Health Center staff member Christopher Mack, what began as a drop-in choir at the Wesley Health Center in Skid Row has since grown into a multi-faceted organization. In addition to running the now semi-auditioned performance choir, which rehearses twice a week and performs numerous concerts each year, Urban Voices Project's staff of musicians and music therapists facilitate weekly drop-in music workshops at several health centers throughout Greater Los Angeles. Early in their first year, Urban Voices Project received fiscal sponsorship from Street Symphony, although they remained and continue to be a fully separate organization. While the two organizations collaborate closely and frequently, they maintain decidedly different aims; Street Symphony has historically been a concert organizer, while Urban Voices Project works daily and directly with community members to create their own musical experiences.

In speaking about Street Symphony, Gupta often frames his talks around the power of music to heal social divisions and personal traumas (Gupta 2012; PBS Newshour 2019). Yet invariably he is not only talking about the healing experienced by participants in Street Symphony programs who are living in conditions of homelessness and incarceration, but also about healing experienced by the musicians and staff who work with and alongside those participants. As Gupta told me, his ongoing work in Skid Row "actually offers a tremendous pathway to my own healing. And as a musician to make art and music in community is to be closer to what I have always considered to be the most exciting and rewarding conditions to make music to begin with" (Gupta 2019a). Similarly, Urban Voices Project defines their mission as "Bringing the healing power of

music directly to individuals marginalized by homelessness, mental health issues, and unemployment in the Greater Los Angeles area" (Urban Voices Project 2021). Discussing this mission statement with me, Leeav Sofer pointed out that the organization is in the process of revising it to state that they create "supportive community spaces through music that bridge vulnerable individuals to a sense of purpose and improved health." Sofer elaborated that "healing used to be the first word, now it's creating supportive community spaces. So where can healing be done? It has to be done in a healthy space that feels safe" (Sofer 2019).

Both Gupta and Sofer here locate music's healing potential explicitly within the practice of building community, understood as the building of inter-personal relationships through music that are experienced by participants as supportive, safe, and empowering. Notably, the precise nature of what is healed, how to measure it, and how music specifically accomplishes this all remain open-ended. Healing, rather, is imagined by these musical and community leaders as a social possibility inherent in a communal musical and social setting. It is through building community by musical means that the healing properties of music are made manifest and give meaning to the music for those who enact and experience them. It is not my intention in this chapter to discount the quantitative study of how music-making can improve health outcomes for participants, studies which continue to inform and shape cultural understandings of music's power to heal and which are too numerous to recount here. Rather, in studying one particular cultural understanding of healing in community context, I contend that it becomes possible to discuss healing as a particular style of social and musical performance.

Music and Healing in Ethnomusicology and Music Therapy

The cultural study of community, music, and healing reflects a growing area of concern and overlap within the disciplines of both ethnomusicology and certain branches of music therapy. In

particular, scholars writing within the sub-discipline of medical ethnomusicology have investigated "cultural understandings and interpretations of disease and illness and health and healing while focusing on the performative nature of diagnosis, treatment, and healing" (Koen, Barz, and Brumel-Smith 2008, 15). Building on older ethnomusicological studies of culturally-specific acts of healing in the ritual traditions of individual non-Western societies (e.g., Laderman and Roseman 1996; Baumann 1997; Gouk 2000), contemporary medical ethnomusicologists have turned their attention today to how music and performance have played a role in educating populations about disease and recovery (Barz 2006; Barz and Cohen 2011), as well as how performances of musical healing can come to stand in for or even replace modern medicine in locations where access is limited (Koen 2009). At the same time, scholars working in the area of applied ethnomusicology have studied how music is employed for positive health outcomes in Western urban settings, such as community health centers in Vancouver's Downtown East Side (Harrison 2020) and musical ensembles for neuro-diverse children (Bakan 2015). Applied ethnomusicologists writing about health have taken a strong advocacy stance in their research through prominently foregrounding the voices and perspectives of their cultural interlocutors in their writing, as well as being actively engaged as musical facilitators and performers within the clinical contexts they study. Throughout these approaches, ethnomusicological scholarship has held in common the notion of healing as a thematic, an effort to understand how the idea that music can heal has been imagined and put to use by individuals and communities in varying cultural contexts.

Similarly, the discipline of music therapy has through the twenty-first century taken a cultural turn associated with work in the community (Stige 2016). While traditional music therapy sought to connect specific music- and sound-related treatment protocols to specific health outcomes in a one-on-one client relationship (Steele 2016), the advent of the sub-discipline of "community music therapy" has increasingly seen therapists working holistically in group and community settings and

non-clinical contexts. Gary Andsell provides a preliminary definition of community music therapy as "an approach to working musically with people *in context*: acknowledging the social and cultural factors of their health, illness, relationships and musics" (Andsell 2002, n.p, emphasis in original). Much of the literature on community music therapy remains concerned with how music is used for healing purposes by people in everyday life and relies on ethnography and interpretive methodologies to study participants' own understandings of music's connection to their own healing in specific community-based case studies (Bonde, Ruud, Skanland and Trondalen 2013; Stige, Andsell, Elefant, and Pavlicevic 2016). Of greatest importance here is how the literature on community music therapy has strongly impacted the field and practice of Community Music, briefly referenced in Chapter One (Higgins 2012). With regards to choral music specifically, several studies and profiles on choral singing and health have been framed by the confluence of therapeutic and community music literatures (Balsnes 2014; Higgins and Willingham 2017; Lee, Stewart, and Clift 2018; Clift, Gilbert, and Vella-Burrows 2018).

I raise both disciplinary perspectives here because they have bearing on the methodology of this present chapter and the existing literature on singing and health. Although they have been described as "sister disciplines" by music therapist Brynjulf Stige, music therapy and the ethnomusicology of health have maintained an uneasy co-existence, possibly because of diffuse understandings of the meaning of important focal terms such as "medical" and "healing" (Stige 2008). Recently, several attempts to bridge the two disciplines have taken place (Chiang 2008; Lipski 2014; Bakan 2014; Jones 2014; Carrico 2015; Edwards and MacMahon 2015; Mitchell 2019). As Edwards and MacMahon (2015) write: "Through applied music making both the therapist and the ethnomusicologist use music to help individuals and groups to strengthen their connections to community, directly or indirectly reducing symptomatology, and creating opportunities for interpersonal connections and resonances that create psychological safety" (n.p.). Of critical note

here is how the authors imagine the community as both the site and the impetus of healing for participants, as well as the common ground through which inter-disciplinary scholarship can take place. For scholars interested in the cultural construction of healing through music, community-building through music-making is itself acknowledged a potential act of healing, whether or not its bio-medical impacts can be directly measured.

In the spirit of Edwards and MacMahon's writing, I suggest that choral composers, leaders, and singers working in community could also be added to this list of those who "use music to help." This chapter, then, seeks to add to a primarily ethnographic and interpretive literature on music and healing to explore how other musical professionals and participants responded in one case to the idea that creating music in community can heal through the creation and performance of a new piece of choral concert music. By offering a detailed portrait of musical practitioners at work in applied music making—composing, performing, rehearsing, speaking about their work—I argue that creating new choral music together in community was imagined as an act of personal and social healing by those who created *Take What You Need*. The precise nature of how that healing could be effected musically through compositional means is the object of my study.

Reena Esmail and Compositional Relationship Building

Vijay Gupta commissioned Reena Esmail to write the piece that eventually became *Take What You Need* in the elevator of a downtown women's jail in Los Angeles in 2015, following a Street Symphony concert that featured one of her string quartets. Esmail had been in attendance, and according to Gupta had surprised many of the inmate attendees by being a living woman of color whose music was featured on the program. Gupta realized that Esmail had something she could offer the community, and envisioned commissioning a piece of music "that could be for all people to have a therapeutic space." As Gupta recounted to me:

> The idea for *Take What You Need* emerged as this kind of flexible challenge to Reena to create something in which audiences found themselves reflected in the music that was played for them…And so part of the way I commissioned the work was to place her on retainer. I said, 'Go and have this experience, go and do whatever you think you need to do within the Street Symphony network and within Skid Row to create this piece.' (Gupta 2019a)

By her own admission, Esmail had little experience with the Skid Row neighborhood or working with people experiencing homelessness when she began her journey towards creating the piece (Esmail 2019). Raised in Los Angeles, Esmail moved to New York City in 2001 to attend the Juilliard School of Music for her undergraduate degree in composition. American born, Esmail is Indian by heritage. Yet it wasn't until beginning her master's degree in composition at the Yale School of Music (2009-2011) that she began instruction Hindustani music—North Indian classical music—in earnest. She enrolled in a course on Indian classical music and founded the Hindi vocal ensemble Sur et Verital. A year on a Fulbright-Nehru scholarship in 2011-2012 allowed her to study Hindustani voice in India under the tutelage of sitarist Gaurav Mazumdar. Since returning to Los Angeles in 2016 and completing her DMA degree at the Yale School of Music in 2017, Esmail has continued to study and collaborate with Hindustani musicians in the Los Angeles area including most prominently vocalist Saili Oak, with whom Esmail runs Shastra, a concert organization that promotes collaborations between Western and Indian classical musicians (Pope 2019b).

Many of Esmail's most well-known compositions prominently feature a synthesis of both Western and Hindustani classical techniques, as well as requiring performers versed in these two traditions to collaborate (Esmail 2018). Amongst her choral works, the piece exemplifying this trait most prominently is *This Love Between Us* (2017), an oratorio for choir, Western and Indian classical vocal soloists, baroque orchestra, tabla and sitar. Commissioned in 2016 for a 2017 tour to India by the Yale Schola Cantorum and Juilliard 415 baroque orchestra, the work is intended as a companion piece to J.S. Bach's *Magnificat*, using the same vocal forces and Western instrumentation. Each

movement features spiritual texts drawn from a gamut of world religions including Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sufi Islam. In another example, Esmail's *Tuttarana* (2014) for SSA or SATB choir draws directly from the genre of *tarana*, a Hindustani solo vocal genre in which the vocalist sings syllables derived from Hindustani rhythmic notation in increasingly rapid and virtuosic combinations. Esmail wanted to explore what this form might sound like translated into a Western choral ensemble setting. Esmail's works for orchestra and Hindustani performers, such as *Meri Sakhi Ki Avaaz* (My Sister's Voice) (2018) and *Aria* (2010), equally demonstrate her commitment to providing a platform for Hindustani musicians and elements of Hindustani music to be valued within the context of Western classical musical performance.

Yet others of Esmail's choral pieces do not draw directly on the idea of cultural hybridity. In *I Rise: Women in Song* (2016), Esmail sets texts by women poets, including Emily Dickinson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Maya Angelou and Arlene Geller. *Earth Speaks* (2015), a three-movement work commissioned by the Pasadena Master Chorale, uses texts from Californian Indigenous tribes, press releases from the US Geological survey, and amateur haiku poems written in response to the Curiosity rover landing on Mars to explore perspectives of what it means to live on Earth. Conductor Lindsay Pope, in a doctoral dissertation on Esmail's choral music, writes that her works "often address contemporary social issues…[linking] her music to current cultural concerns by using it as a platform to promote social justice" (Pope 2019b, 23). Pope analyzes Esmail's choral output through an intersectional feminist perspective, using aspects of Esmail's biography alongside musical analysis to ask: "How do gender and cross-cultural identity intersect in choral music?" (Pope 2019b, 4). While this is certainly one important part of the story of Esmail's profile as a composer, Esmail herself often chooses to talk about her compositional practice using a language of dialogue and inter-personal connection. "Every piece that I write I'm thinking what is the interaction between

people," she told me in an interview. "I just want to connect people to one another" (Esmail 2019). In speaking about her compositional practice publicly, Esmail explicitly connects her realization of the importance of relationship building within her compositions to her own learning process in creating *Take What You Need* (Rowan 2018).

In a series of handwritten pre-compositional notes for *Take What You Need* from early 2016 (Esmail 2016c), Esmail grapples with how to construct inter-personal relationships between musical participants through the musical materials of a piece of concert music. Compiled before she had begun her collaboration with the Urban Voices Project, and before she had arrived at a title and libretto for the piece, it is notable how almost all of the concepts she discusses in her notes worked their way into the final piece. The notes take a stream-of-consciousness approach and are written largely in full sentences, as if Esmail were transcribing a conversation with herself or perhaps her responses to queries from Gupta. Most strikingly, she had already at this time envisioned the necessity to involve the audience as full participants in each performance of the work. "There is no longer performer/audience" she writes in one note. "It is more 'support group' positioning—all speaking, all listening." By breaking down the distinction between performer and audience, Esmail here connects the idea of relationship-building as a compositional practice to the creation of the "therapeutic space" that Gupta had initially proposed.

Headings such as "Structure of Words" and "Structure of Instrumental Interludes" within the notes reveal that Esmail had already in this early stage conceived of an alternation between spoken, sung and un-texted material, ultimately realized as the sing-along melody and the storytelling interludes that we encountered in the opening vignette of the chapter. Thinking through the purpose of both types of musical material, Esmail is concerned with opportunities for participants to see their own creative input incorporated into and validated through each performance. Esmail envisions one possibility for the text in which a "moderator says a phrase like 'I miss…' or 'I

wish…"" and has their statement echoed back by the whole ensemble; this structure proceeds like a "mantra" encompassing all participants until "they are all wishing for the wishes of each other." Similarly, for the instrumental parts, Esmail describes how "perhaps each phrase starts in a characteristic way, and a single melodic line comes in with a 'question' phrase—to which the ensemble responds so essentially that first phrase lets the ensemble know where they are in the piece." Esmail here imagines a form of musical dialogue between participants that is liberated from the confines of a score, a dialogue grounded in listening to each other and sharing musical motives, again opening up the space for musical communication. While this technique was not incorporated into the instrumental writing of the final piece, it remains recognizable in the call-and-response melody that ultimately formed the structural basis of the chorus. At the same time, the inclusion of both spoken and sung participation in the piece would, in Esmail's view, create multiple entry points for participants of differing musical ability and for different types of self-expression.

Despite her interest in creating as many opportunities as possible for participation in the work, Esmail also remains concerned with "trajectory" or form—ensuring that the work is not just a participatory event but a recognizable and reproducible musical object. In particular, she poses the following questions: "Is there a pre-conceived trajectory to the work? Is the trajectory something that can change/evolve along with the creation of the work?…how to get something to be coherent even if it is fragments…" Esmail's interest in trajectory and the idea of "the work" distinctly differentiates her community-engaged practice as a composer, which I define here as social practice composition, from similar participatory or facilitatory practices in music therapy or Community Music. Uniquely, Esmail imagines interaction amongst participants in the work not simply as an end in itself, but as a compositional means, a device to be used aesthetically. The resulting piece must also remain true to ideas of form and trajectory derived from the norms of Western concert art music. In other words, through theorizing relationship building as compositional technique, Esmail

set out to stage a performance of community participation, a performance that would be adaptable to the needs of each community that undertook it yet simultaneously singular and individual—a distinct musical work.

Creating *Take What You Need*

Esmail was introduced to the Urban Voices Project in mid-2016, and quickly realized this would be the group she would collaborate with on Gupta's commission. She began attending their weekly rehearsals, and over several months began to get to know the choir members personally and integrate herself into their community in order to write a piece for and about them. Early on, Esmail had some consternation over finding an appropriate text for the piece; she found traditional American community singing texts to be overly nationalistic and patriarchal, while trying to encapsulate the Urban Voices Project members' life experiences using her own words seemed disingenuous. She eventually remembered a moment that provided a spark of inspiration for the libretto for the piece:

> I [remembered] this family friend of mine who teaches yoga to victims of sexual violence. She had posted this photo on her Instagram a year before of a board, and she would put it outside her yoga class and the board just said 'take what you need.' On the board were all these post-it notes with words like 'compassion,' 'care, 'joy,' 'love.' And I looked at it, and I thought this needs to be the piece. (Esmail 2019)

Esmail then described going to a dictionary of American idioms and searching for any responses to comforting emotions or actions one could "take." She described narrowing down her list and developing a trajectory from more inward emotions to those that were more outward and back again, ultimately ending up with the list that became the libretto for *Take What You Need*:

> Take a moment…Take a breath…Take time…Take care…Take heart…Take hope…Take a step…Take a chance…Take courage…Take charge…Take a stand…Take pride…Take joy…Take pause…Take a moment…Take a breath…Take what you need. (Esmail 2016a)

By setting each of these phrases in call-and-response, Esmail imagined that participants in the piece would have the opportunity to offer emotional support to each other and experience the support of others, while also being supported in their singing by an accompanying group of professional musicians.

Esmail takes care to note that the piece is designed to be a level playing field between these different groups of professional and amateur musicians. While the call-and-response melody is meant to be easy enough to learn by those who don't read music, other vocal and instrumental parts of the piece require a certain level of Western classical musical training to perform well. Yet all parts are necessary in order to perform the piece, and the parts for each type of musical group are designed to maximize that group's potential for self-expression through musical means. In this way, each performance of *Take What You Need* implicitly values the collaboration between professional and amateur community musicians or audience members, and these two groups have in most performances also represented different socio-economic backgrounds. Esmail explains:

> your job [as a composer] is to open the space for a community. It's about a dialogue between people from different circumstances. How do I value the professional choir as much as I value the community choir, because they're also doing this work because they deeply want to connect. So things like allowing certain choruses to be really sweeping, really allowing them to sing to their full extent, it allows me to show them that I value them as well. (Esmail 2019)

Originally scored for string orchestra and double choir, *Take What You Need* is deliberately scalable in order to be accessible to different performance forces and situations. In addition to the string orchestra version, versions for string quartet and double choir as well as a version for single choir and violin obbligato are available for download from a special website (twyn.info). Each of these versions is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License, which makes them freely available for reproduction and performance by ensembles anywhere free of copyright restrictions. In her program note in the score, Esmail encourages

performing groups to include or omit choruses and interludes as necessary to tailor the form of the piece to their own needs (Esmail 2016a, 2). Esmail also described to me a version of the piece that she performs as a duet with Gupta, in which she speaks the words of the libretto while Gupta plays the melody alone on violin. During my time observing Urban Voices Project, I also participated in a community sing-along of the piece, accompanied solely by an improvised piano accompaniment, which I describe in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

As illustrated in the opening vignette of the chapter, the principal structural elements of *Take What You Need* are a sung chorus with audience participation and an instrumental interlude during which community members are invited to speak. The accompanying choral and string parts are intended to be performed by a professional or skilled amateur ensemble, while during the choruses a soloist leads the assembled audience or participants in learning the melody in call-and-response. Although not explicitly indicated in the score, another community choir usually sings along with the audience's responses, visibly performing the idea of dialogue and encouraging the audience to join in. In the standard version of the piece, the chorus is sung four times, each growing in complexity: the first consists of just the leading melody and echoing audience, with some supporting harmonies on the syllable "na" in the choir (Figure 2.1); the second features a four-part chorale-style harmonization of the melody (Figure 2.2); the third is scored for double choir, with the second choir singing polyphonic elaborations of the melody overtop of the homophonic second chorus material (Figure 2.3); the fourth chorus returns to the homophonic choral setting, while the polyphonic material is taken up by the strings and a vocal descant joins in over the whole ensemble (Figure 2.4). During these latter choruses, the choir is meant to take on a greater role in leading the call-and-response, although Esmail writes that a single "facilitator" should still lead the audience from in front of the ensemble for the entire duration of the piece.

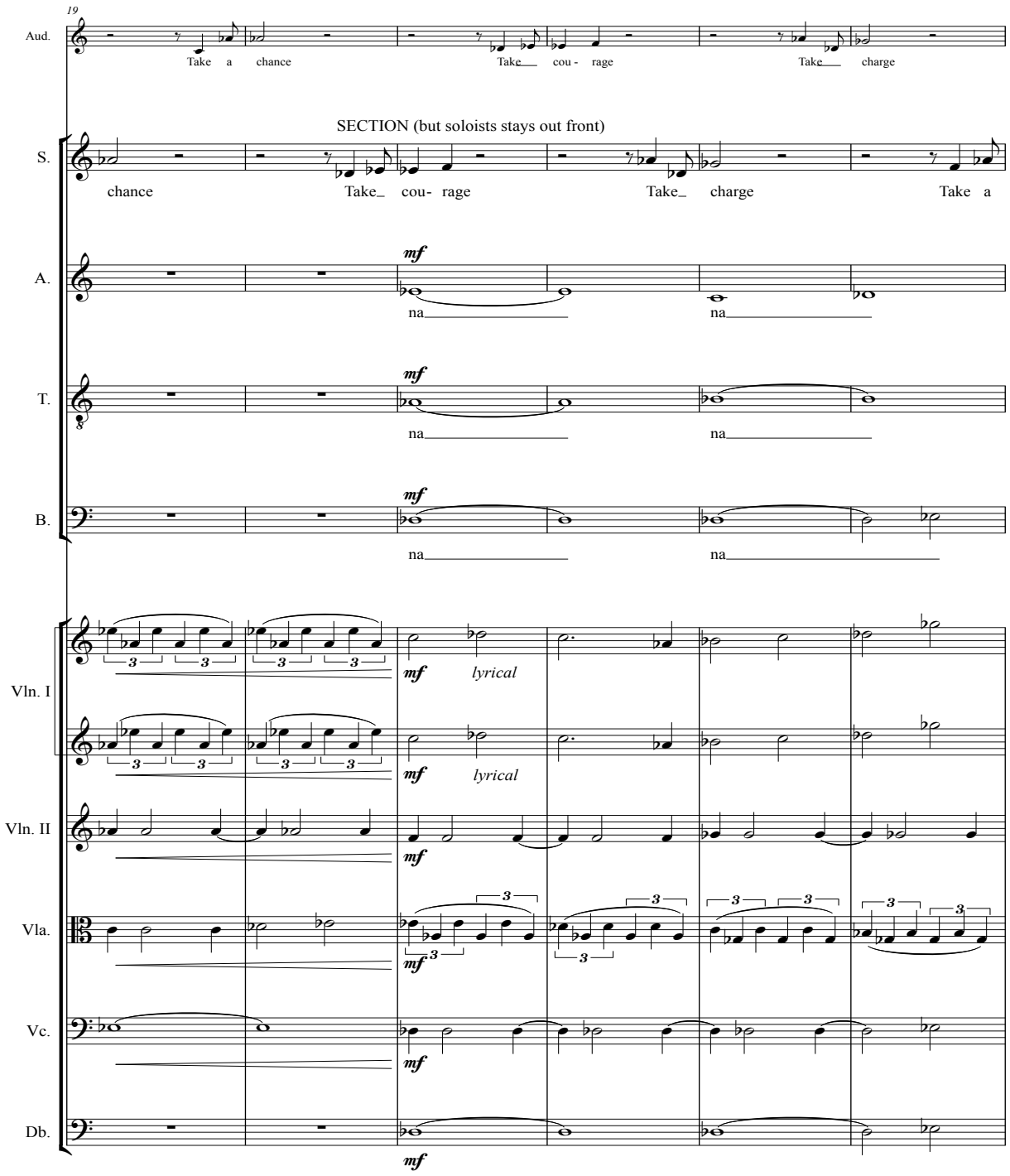


Figure 2.1 Reena Esmail, *Take What You Need,* middle of first chorus, mm19-24. Showcasing call-and-response compositional technique.

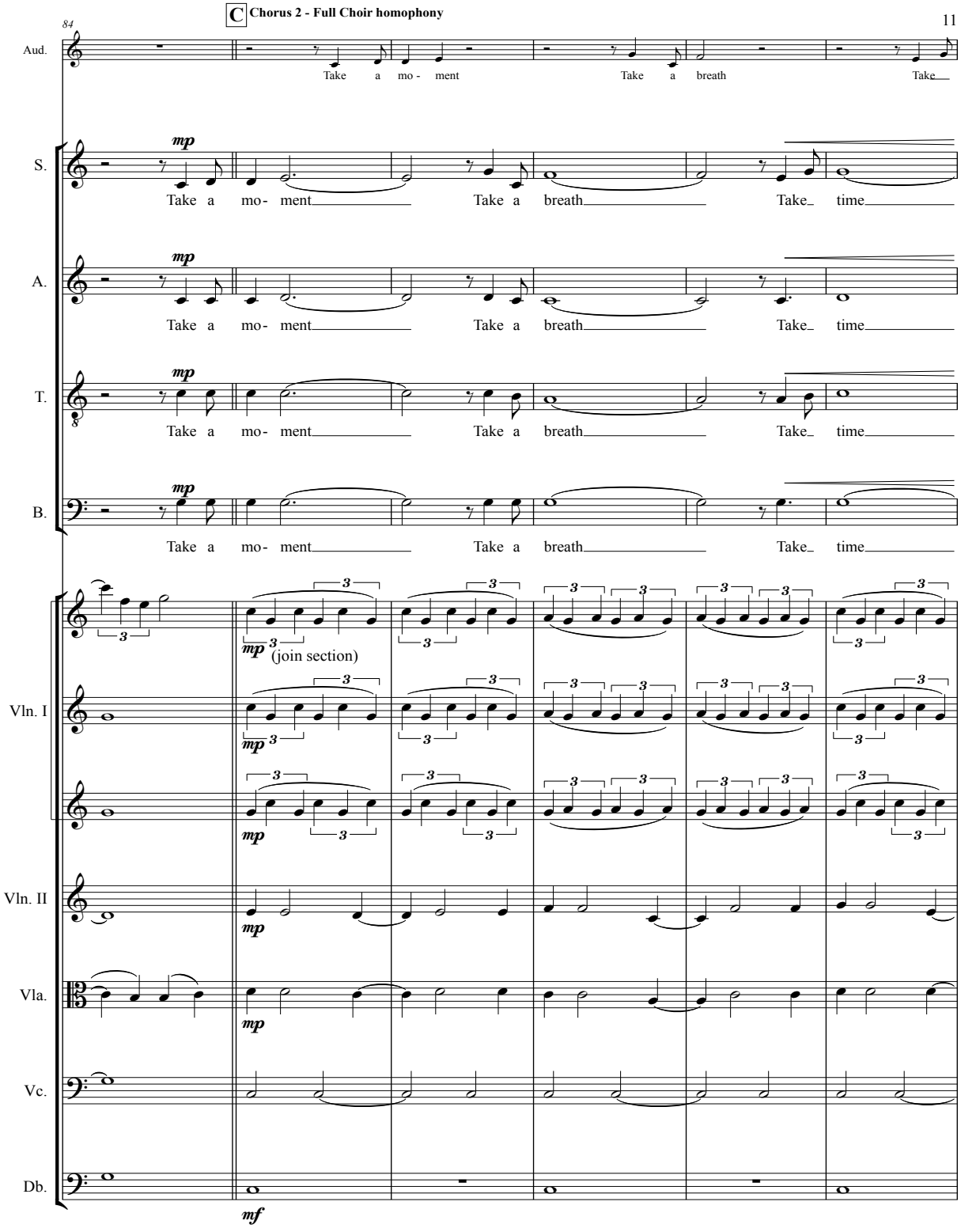


Figure 2.2 Reena Esmail, *Take What You Need,* start of second chorus, mm84-89. Homophonic choral setting of principal melody.

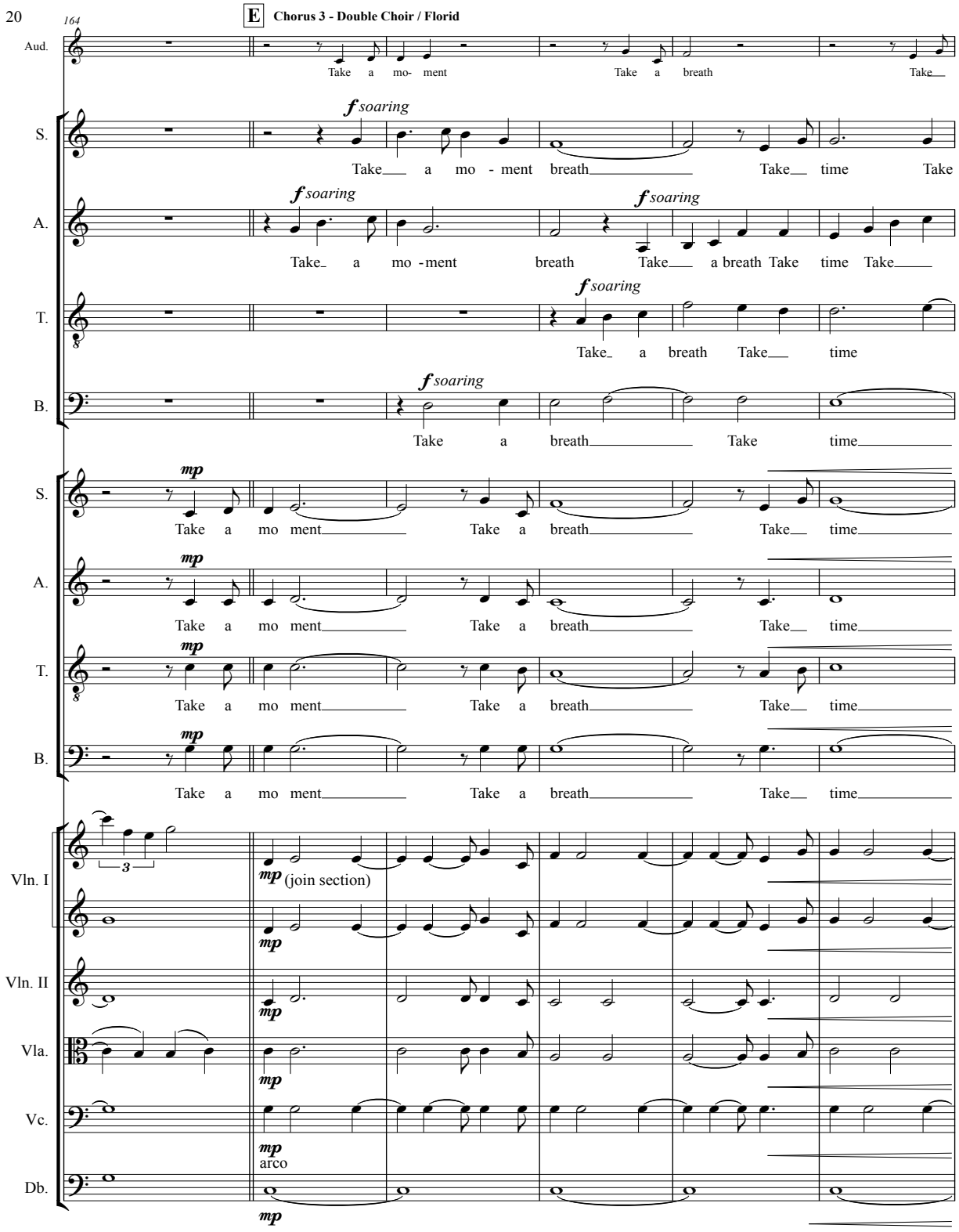


Figure 2.3 Reena Esmail, *Take What You Need,* start of third chorus, mm164-169. Polyphonic double-choir setting.

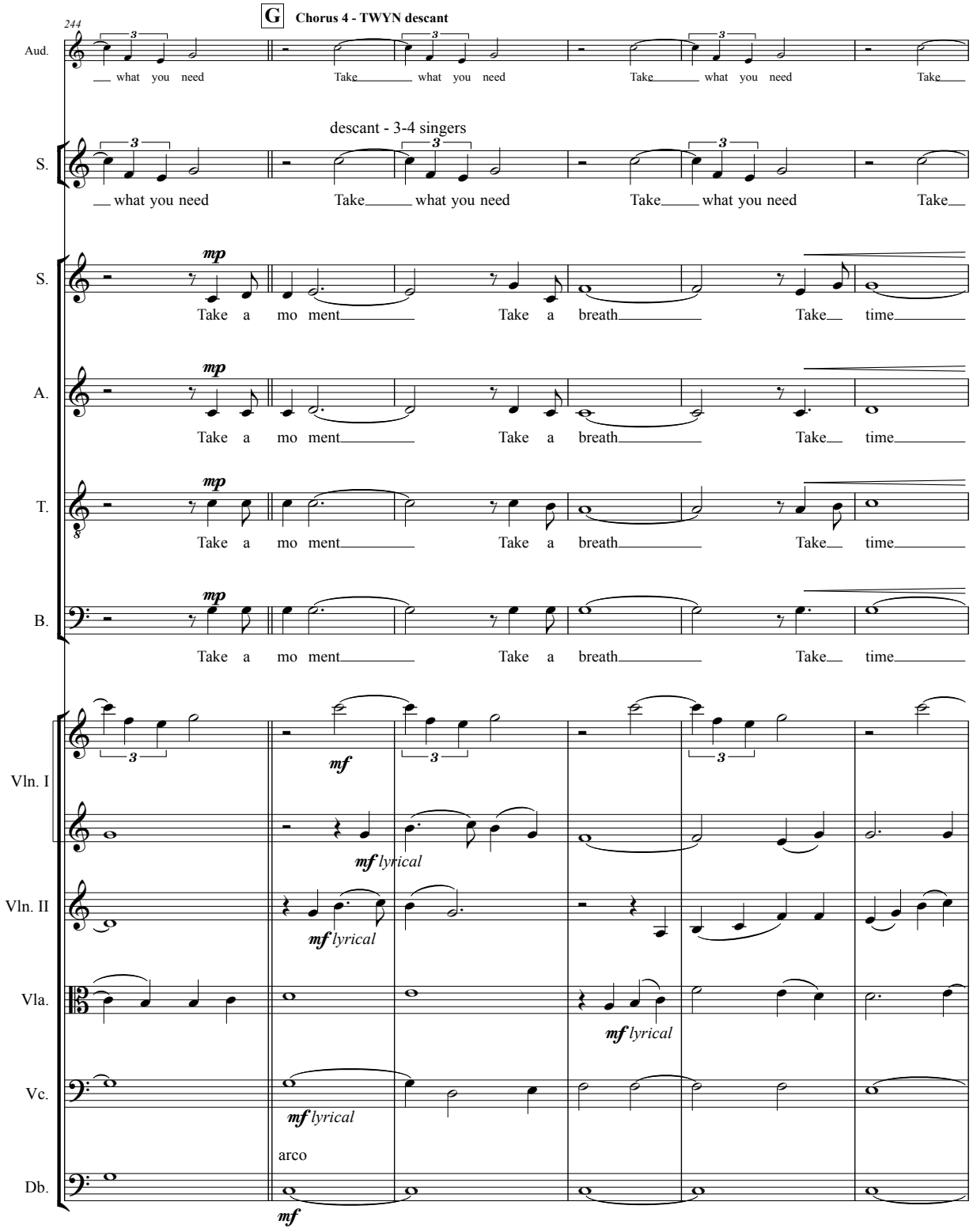


Figure 2.4 Reena Esmail. *Take What You Need,* start of fourth chorus, mm244-249. Polyphonic elaboration of melody in the strings.

Interspersed between each chorus are instrumental interludes that provide an opportunity for community participants to speak. While all the interludes are musically identical, they become differentiated by the words and stories that participants contribute during these moments. Each interlude incorporates a "vamp" or loop at the end, a section of music that can be repeated ad libitum in order for the end of the interlude to coincide with the end of a speaker's contribution, deliberately giving speakers space to finish their story without cutting them off prematurely (Figure 2.5). While the concert versions of *Take What You Need* I have encountered have all featured speakers who have pre-prepared their stories, Esmail describes the interludes as open-ended. In the

This loop is built into the piece in order to give community members the time and space they need to share. They should not feel constrained by a time limit or stressed out by having to hear musical cues. Loop as long as necessary in order to best support those who are using the space, and let the "Take What You Need" melody gently bring them to a natural cadence point.

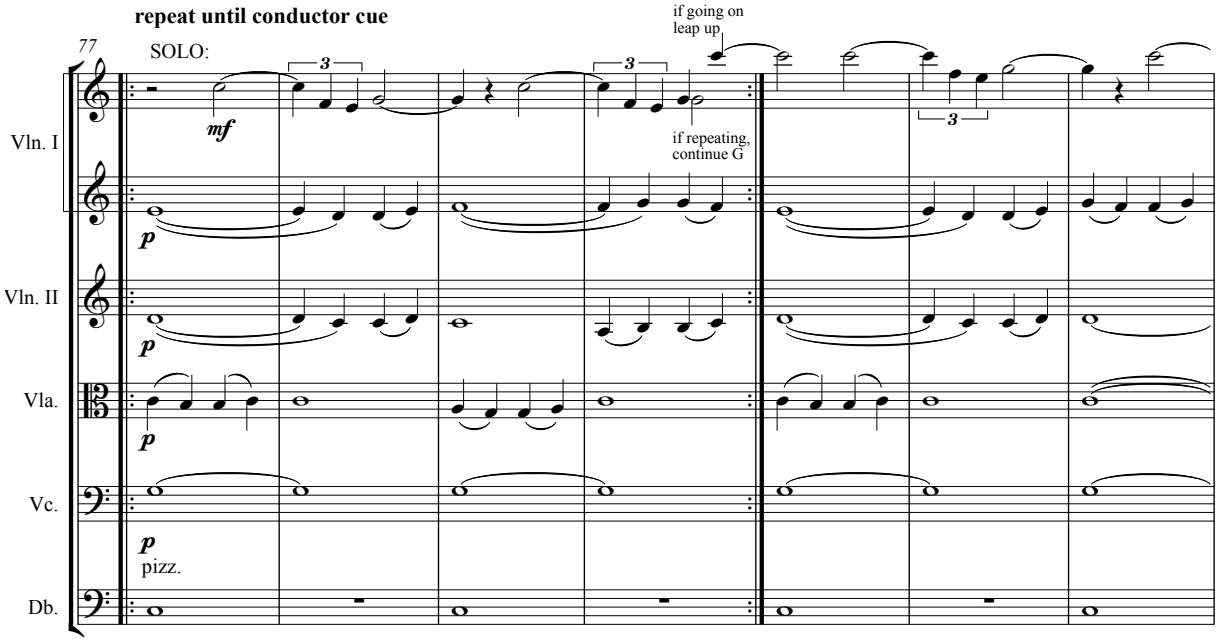


Figure 2.5 Reena Esmail, *Take What You Need,* mm 77-83. Instrumental "vamp" to conclude community storytelling section.

front-matter to the score, she writes: "You can invite audience members to answer a question. You can ask members of your community to tell their stories. Even asking people how they are feeling, or to say the name of someone they're thinking about can be healing and cathartic" (Esmail 2016a, 2). Gupta described to me one workshop performance of *Take What You Need* in a Los Angeles county jail where, during the interludes, inmate attendees were asked to respond to the question "While you're here, what keeps you going?" As the interlude played, the participants "spoke names of their families, they spoke the names of their loved ones or their children, and it was this intensely emotional moment where… somehow the music allowed and gave space for that question to be grappled with and answered and received" (Gupta 2019).

Part of how the music grants this space is through its harmonic language. *Take What You Need* is mostly written in C major, and Esmail frequently uses suspensions and added seconds and sixths in the string parts, creating an emotionally stirring and cinematic sweep that also references musical tropes of soothing and support. Each melodic fragment is set to three or four pitches, generally narrow in range so as to be easy to sing, although becoming wider as the piece progresses. In my discussions with her, Esmail highlighted how she tried to find the specific sound of each individual word in the libretto, and many of her harmonic decisions appear to support this thinking. Mid-way through the chorus, an abrupt move to an A-flat major chord through the common shared tone of C seems to relate to the words "take a stand." This A-flat harmony is quickly reinterpreted as a dominant, and from m20-30 in the chorus the ensemble and audience sing in Dflat major, the raised tonality increasing the energy and fervency of the more outward lyrics such as "take pride" and "take joy" in this section. Yet on the words "take pause," Esmail shifts to a surprising D flat minor 7th chord. Using another common tone modulation, Esmail moves through e minor 6 to F major and finally back C major, arriving to the home tonality on the concluding words "take what you need." Throughout, Esmail's harmonic decisions in each phrase overtly connect to the emotion

expressed in each textual fragment, while the overall harmonic trajectory of the piece performs a sense of comfort through a major modal harmonic language of tension and release.

Explicitly, neither the music nor the libretto in any way reference homelessness, incarceration, mental illness, poverty, or indeed any particular social issue. This was a purposeful decision by Esmail, informed by her time rehearsing with and getting to know the singers in the Urban Voices Project. "They wanted to sing a piece that wasn't necessarily about the plight of their situation," she told me, "because that's their daily life, and they don't come to sing to reflect on how upsetting things are" (Esmail 2019). Instead, Esmail makes space for the piece to be a response to and a respite from whatever experiences community participants bring to the musical space. In a promotional video for the piece, produced by Street Symphony, Esmail speaks to a group of community attendees who have come to one of the first workshop performances of the piece in Skid Row. "The one thing that I really wanted to express through this piece is just a sense of comfort," she says. "You know, sometimes you feel like you just want a hug. You want someone to tell you that things are going to be okay, and you just want to feel some support" (Street Symphony 2016).

Each performance of *Take What You Need* thus becomes not only about the experiences affecting the community that participants decide to share during the interludes, but also about the support that participants are able to offer and take through the relationships they build with each other through the performance. As can be observed throughout the discussion above, each of Esmail's compositional decisions in creating *Take What You Need* related directly to her aim of offering comfort and support through relationship building, a goal that strongly correlates with the missions of both Street Symphony and the Urban Voices Project to work towards personal and social healing through music. The libretto is structured as a litany of comforting emotions, given and received between participants. The melody unfolds as a dialogue between two groups of often

different socio-economic classes, reaffirming a shared humanity through visibly speaking across class divides. The parts for each of these groups inherently value their individual capacities for musical and self-expression, while the harmonic language of the work continually signifies support. The interludes open a space for the piece to take on the meanings that community speakers assign to it, heightening the emotional resonance of their speech through the musical underscoring and facilitating empathy between participants.

Yet, at the same time, *Take What You Need* is in many ways a piece that resists musical analysis. These technical elements of the work do not, in the end, serve to symbolize or represent healing, comfort, or well-being in sound. Instead, it is through realizing these aspects of the piece in time and in performance that Esmail intends for participants to experience healing. Through foregrounding relationship building as a compositional means, Esmail enacts a performative understanding of healing implicitly tied to the building of community. In other words, a performance of *Take What You Need* creates a community space using specific musical resources, through which healing, culturally understood, can be socially enacted.

In the next section, I explore questions of practice related to the role of *Take What You Need* within its own community of origin, specifically the Urban Voices Project choir. Through fieldwork and my own role as a participant-observer, I examine the extent to which a claim of healing can be made for the work, asking how Esmail organizes social space through musical means, and how that organization of space affects the piece's potential to be perceived as healing by those who take part in its performance.

Take What You Need in Community Context: Visiting the Urban Voices Project

For three days in December 2019, I shadowed the activities of the Urban Voices Project, meeting choir leaders and members and attending their weekly events. At the time, they were

preparing for several December performances, including the Messiah Project concert, a Christmas Eve performance at Los Angeles' Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, and a Christmas morning caroling tour through the missions of Skid Row. Although my visit was short, I was able to observe the full range of their weekly programming, including a Family Sing workshop for parents and pre-schoolers, a drop-in Neighborhood Sing workshop for community participants, a Music Wellness workshop, their regular performance choir rehearsal, and their performance at the Messiah Project. It is admittedly outside the scope of this chapter to document Urban Voices Project's ongoing work in detail, or to offer anything resembling a guide to musical practice with communities experiencing homelessness. Instead, what I provide here is a brief snapshot of some of their weekly activities, in order to place the origins and distinct musical features of *Take What You Need* in context, and to open a larger discussion about how healing through community music-making is made legible by the artists and leaders behind *Take What You Need*.

Much of Urban Voices Project's everyday work revolves around a repertoire of songs in popular music idioms whose lyrics provide strong messages of support or resonate with the life experience of participants. Songs from the pop music canon, such as Bill Withers' "Lean on Me," feature familiar melodies that easily invite participants to join in and sing, while offering choir leaders opportunities to teach harmony by rote that encourage participation and personal growth. Other songs, such as Maggie Wheeler's "Walk With Me," originally written for Los Angeles' Golden Bridge Choir, circulate within networks of choir leaders whose work intersects with social justice causes. More recently, Sofer has begun to work with Urban Voices Project choir members on collaborative songwriting. In one recent project, choir members wrote lyrics together for a new holiday song, prominently evoking the intersections and landmarks of their neighborhood and ending with the memorable line "think about a holiday we all call home." Sofer added the melody

and accompaniment, and the choir premiered the song at both the Messiah Project and on national television during their Christmas Eve performance at Los Angeles' Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

While the public activities of the performance choir have contributed greatly to Urban Voices Project's visibility, Sofer describes the Neighborhood Sing as the organization's most unique work and the heart of their developing practice. Less a rehearsal than a jam session with a support group mentality, Neighborhood Sings offer anyone who drops into the workshop a safe space to sing out and explore their voice, both physically and metaphorically. During a typical Neighborhood Sing, Sofer guides participants through several songs and uses the lyrics to open up discussions about challenges in their own lives.

During my own visit to the Neighborhood Sing, Sofer leads a group of drop-in participants, regular performance choir members, and several observers like myself through a rendition of "Man in the Mirror," as originally performed by Michael Jackson. The song's chorus is familiar to many of us, and we competently sing it all together the first time through. For the less familiar verses, Sofer teaches us the music in call-and-response. One lyric in particular gives us pause— "I see the kids in the streets/With not enough to eat/Who am I to be blind/Pretending not to see their needs?"—and we spend some time talking about it. One participant relates how helpless she feels now when she encounters child poverty. Although she no longer lives in Skid Row, she tells us, she knows what those children's lives are like, and knows there is little she can currently do to help. Another person points out how important it is to simply notice that poverty is an ongoing issue, to bear witness to it and not look away as the lyrics remind us it is so easy to do. We continue singing and arrive at the last line of the chorus, "take a look at yourself and make that change." By rote, Sofer teaches us a two-part harmony on the word "change." "What kind of change are you here today to make?" Sofer asks, and he urges us to think about that change specifically each time we sing the word. We repeat the chorus, adding the harmony and our own personal commitments to our performance.

Later during the workshop, Urban Voices Project's wellness coordinator Kate Richards Geller, a professional music therapist, takes over and leads us through *Take What You Need*. The piece has been stripped down to its essentials—just the melodic call-and-response, with none of Esmail's string and choral counterpoint—yet the core of the piece is still recognizable. Sofer improvises an accompaniment on the keyboard while Geller and another choir member act as leaders, offering each phrase to us to sing back. When we reach the interlude, Geller asks us to think about what making music together means to us. Sofer continues to improvise on the keyboard as people talk. One participant speaks at great length about how learning to play a new instrument late in life taught him that he was capable of picking up new skills, a realization that has helped him in other areas of his life as well. Another talks about finding support with the people he comes here to sing with every week. We sing the chorus once again, and I make a greater effort to look up and sing to those around me. It seems to me that many others are doing the same.

Through my own role as a participant-observer during the Neighborhood Sing, I realize how many of Esmail's musical choices in *Take What You Need* grow out of Urban Voices Project's ongoing practice. From call-and-response teaching to providing open-ended space for participants to reflect on both the music and their lives, *Take What You Need* is in many ways a codification of the techniques that Urban Voices Project leaders employ every week in their workshops. Key to the success of both the workshop process and Esmail's piece is the central role of the facilitator, as modeled by Sofer and Geller. In contrast to a conductor or teacher, who might enter the musical space with a specific technical or pedagogical goal in mind, the facilitator's primary aim is to enable musical participants to engage in self-reflection and self-growth by connecting with themselves and others through the musical experience.

Facilitation has already been extensively theorized in literature on Community Music practice. For example, Higgins and Willingham write, "facilitation can be understood as a process

that enables music participants to harness the flow of their creative energy in order to develop and grow through pathways specific to them as individuals and the groups through which they are involved" (Higgins and Willingham 2017, 68). While neither Esmail nor Urban Voices Project's leaders explicitly identify as Community Music practitioners, the way they speak about the social organization of musical space through the role of the facilitator is similar in many respects. As Sofer told me, "Facilitation is very distinct from teaching…[Facilitators] put the structure in place and the scaffolding to create a space in which participants can access their own creativity, find voice, and apply it to the space. You create gaps for the community to fill how they see fit" (Sofer 2019). Similarly, Esmail writes in her notes in the score of *Take What You Need*, "Audiences feel more comfortable engaging in the music if they are invited into the space by a single facilitator" (Esmail 2016a, 2).

In each of these comments, the role of the facilitator is specifically conceived in relation to the well-being of the musical participants. Key words here such as "comfort," "finding voice," and "growth" emphasize both the positive psycho-social benefits of music making that the facilitator can enable for the individual, and simultaneously connect to an imagined communal space through which individuals are able to realize those benefits, be that the "group," the "audience," or the "community." In *Take What You Need,* the facilitator thus becomes the axis around which Esmail organizes a musical social space that is understood as healing. Through providing opportunities to musically lead and follow, to express themselves and listen to others, and to both offer and take support, the facilitator empowers participants in a rehearsal or performance of *Take What You Need* to create the "interpersonal connections and resonances" that Edwards and McMahon argue are a necessary precondition for healing in a community setting. Such a realization draws our attention to how the social organization of musical space responds to the intended purpose of music making, as well as to implicit assumptions about the social organization of musical space that can be encoded

into choral rehearsal practices. In particular, it raises important questions about how musical leaders conceive of their roles within an ensemble, especially if the purpose of that ensemble is to build community.

Urban Voices Project provides a meal following the Neighborhood Sing, and over dinner I ask a few of the performance choir members about *Take What You Need*. I am slightly surprised to learn that they have not sung or performed it in a long time, likely since last year's Messiah Project. "It's just gorgeous" one singer tells me. Another calls it "special," while another uses the word "meditative." They are clearly very taken by it, and still find it familiar. Still, I become aware that soliciting any sort of in-depth analysis of the piece or their personal relationship to it is beside the point. To them, it is one other piece of music in their own journey with the choir, no more or less important than many of the other pieces they sing.

Observing this draws me into the deeper question of the role that the piece has played, continues to play, and is capable of playing in the community life of the choir that originated it. Specifically, I begin to notice ways in which *Take What You Need* contrasts with Urban Voices Project's regular practice. Most obviously, the piece is stylistically outside the bounds of what most Urban Voices Project singers feel is part of their own musical vernacular, the musical styles that community members would use to express themselves, at least according to Sofer. Alongside Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," which the choir also performs annually on the Messiah Project, *Take What You Need* is the only other piece of Western classical art music that is part of the choir's regular repertoire. The remainder of Urban Voices Project's songs are drawn almost exclusively from the popular music canon and popular music styles because, as Sofer tells me, that is what the choir members identify with.

In my discussions with Sofer, I ask about creating music that allows choir members to see themselves reflected in the music, implicitly referencing Gupta's aims when he originally commissioned the piece. Sofer replies by talking more about his collaborative songwriting practice. "All those words were written by the artists," he tells me, using his preferred term for the Urban Voices Project choir members, "and all of a sudden it has become one of the most powerful pieces we've ever performed. And the ownership of the sound, culturally, musically, lyrically, there's so much ownership of the community" (Sofer 2019). Sofer points out that because the words and music stem from their own experience and they had a role in the creative process, the strength and quality of choir members' relationship to their collaboratively written song is heightened. Sofer's comments highlight another way in which Esmail's process of creating *Take What You Need* differed from Urban Voices Project's ongoing work. Although she took care to get to know the community, practice the piece with choir members, and make changes as needed to make it accessible for them, both the libretto and the music were entirely Esmail's creation. Esmail's preferred way to describe her working method was how she "set the piece on the community" (Esmail 2019). Although Esmail spent considerable time integrating herself into the Urban Voices Project community, the choir was not introduced into the musical process of creating *Take What You Need* until after the composition was largely finished. The process of creating the textual and musical materials of *Take What You Need* was not, therefore, collaborative to the same extent as Sofer's songwriting projects. I press Sofer further with regards to how *Take What You Need* contrasts with the rest of his work, and he admits that "most of the community feel like they can't perform it outside of having an orchestra or a classical musician present to create the platform, meaning the accompaniment, for the piece" (Sofer 2019).

To take this comment as an outright criticism of *Take What You Need* is perhaps unfair, and certainly not Sofer's intent, as he makes clear throughout his discussion with me. The piece is, after

all, about creating a shared performance space that equally values musicians of different abilities, and deliberately requires professionals and amateurs, as well as persons from different socio-economic classes, to collaborate on each performance. Yet I raise his comment here because crucially, within the context of the framework laid out by *Take What You Need,* the platform of the performance is still controlled by those participants in the performance who possess greater economic means. Performances of *Take What You Need* are invariably organized by performing arts organizations headed by professional artists. The piece circulates amongst networks of these professionals who program it as a way to bring their own ensembles into contact with marginalized members of their own communities. Even I became aware of the piece, and was enabled to write this chapter, due to my own membership in such social circles. What *Take What You Need* does not set out to do is provide community participants with the means to self-express and create on their own, or to alter the terms of participation in the concert platform itself.

As Ursula Hemetek (2006) notes, providing new social platforms for cultural expression by minority or disadvantaged groups is one area that applied scholars in ethnomusicology can advocate for those communities they work with. As composers like Esmail begin to move in the direction of greater community engagement, it becomes possible to also consider social practice composition as a form of applied research. I contend, therefore, that it also becomes worthwhile to examine best practices as articulated in other applied disciplines and place them in dialogue with the work at hand. I introduce the issues above not as a criticism of *Take What You Need,* but to raise questions of practice that should be considered if composers and choral practitioners are to continue to work in community-engaged settings. If we begin to consider social practice composition more broadly as applied research, then a critical awareness of the platform through which such community compositions are performed and are circulated is warranted. The question then becomes whether the terms of community engagement that the piece espouses are sufficient and accepted for the

community that the piece is meant to champion. Ultimately, that is a question that can only be answered by the community members themselves.

Conclusion

"'Your first mistake is you came up to me and you said, 'I have an idea.' You started your sentence with 'I have an idea for this.' And nothing that you shared with me represents anything that this community may want because you never asked them'" (Sofer 2019). Leeav Sofer is sharing with me some words of advice he received from his own mentor early in his journey as a community-engaged musician. Many months later, as I reflect on our conversation and my own research in preparation for this chapter, I realize he may as well have been speaking of me.

I began this chapter with the intention of writing about how *Take What You Need* accomplishes personal and social healing in Skid Row. I expected that participants I met who were involved in the piece would have strong reactions or relationships to it and would perhaps be able to articulate how the piece effected healing for them. In actual fact, I discovered—unsurprisingly in retrospect—that *Take What You Need* has been just one piece (literally) of the larger project of community-building, music making, and healing taking place between the Urban Voices Project, Street Symphony, and the neighborhood of Skid Row. While the piece builds inter-personal relationships through its performance and for the duration of its performance, it also participates in a larger network of relationships between organizations, professional and community performers, and the music that they perform, all of which in turn contribute to the meaning of the piece itself. The listener or participant is able to understand *Take What You Need* as healing not simply as a result of its intrinsic musical properties—dialogue, storytelling, flexibility of form, participatory ethos—but because the piece participates in and helps to sustain a broader community that is dedicated to this goal. If healing through music is intrinsically tied to community, examining only one small facet of

that community inevitably misses the big picture. Thus, here, I have also endeavored to place this musical work in the full contexts of its origins in a specific community, to understand how it worked to reflect an understanding of that community back to themselves in an effort to contribute to ongoing efforts at promoting healing in one of America's most marginalized neighborhoods.

The full story of Urban Voices Project and Street Symphony is certainly more extensive than can be told here, yet I do not intend this observation to diminish the importance and distinctive musical qualities of *Take What You Need*. The piece remains a unique example of a composer developing the musical means by which she believed she could effect personal and social healing through relationship building in her music, and a community that rallied behind this ideal in performing and supporting her work. While another hypothetical piece could potentially do more to shift the question of access to the concert platform and provide marginalized community participants with a sole showcase, that was never Esmail's intent. In each performance, rather, *Take What You Need* emphasizes and strengthens relationships that are already present within a community and builds relationships between communities that are drawn together because of shared music making, foregrounding how performance itself becomes a site where the meaning of community can be imagined, contested, and maintained. Likewise, it is through the valuing of community in performance that healing emerges.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNITY AS AUTHENTICITY: JULIA WOLFE'S *ANTHRACITE FIELDS* IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

That night we went to work with the sound of the music still in our ears…Later the pounding of the steel drill bits into the stone contributed to our mild nausea and seemed to evoke a similar pounding within our heads…When we came to the surface in the morning the music seemed to have happened a long time ago.
—Alistair MacLeod*, No Great Mischief* (1999, 156-157).

As you enter the Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral, an usher greets you wearing a hard hat and carrying an antique underground lantern—a slim beacon of light in the otherwise darkened sanctuary.[8] Playing the role of an early twentieth-century coal miner, he shows you to one of one-hundred-fifty portable chairs crowded in rows into the church's narrow nave. At the front, a tall, translucent scrim hangs suspended between two vertical supports, obscuring the altar and foregrounding an open floor area that forms a de-facto stage. A cluster of staunch, stubby candles burns quietly on the floor in front. Every window in the church has been blacked out. In the dim light and with a little imagination, the cathedral indeed evokes an underground coal mine.

Conductor Alan Harler and the six instrumentalists of the Bang on a Can All-Stars ensemble enter and take up their positions stage-left. The performance begins. Low, rumbling tones from the piano, cello, bass, percussion, and guitar locate the music deep within the earth. A keening six-five suspension from the clarinet periodically punctuates the amorphous texture, wailing in the dark. Guttural creaks and moans seem to emanate from the walls themselves. In truth, it is the altos of the Mendelssohn Club choir, seated in obscurity on the ground along the cathedral's stage-right wall, vocalizing hauntingly in the back of their throats.

Suddenly, a violent outburst from the ensemble, like an alarm. The tenors and basses of the chorus enter swiftly from a side door and take up formation opposite the instrumentalists. Their

[8] This vignette is a reconstruction of the premiere performance based on video footage of the premiere (Mendelssohn Club 2014) as well as my own interviews with artists and participants. I was not in attendance.

shirts, screen-printed with the blackened contours of coal deposits, contrast starkly with the loose-fitting white attire of the instrumentalists. Over the ensemble's continued rumblings, the men begin methodically chanting single-syllable names of miners whose lives were lost in mine accidents. Their stern monotone betrays little sentiment: "John…Ace…John…Art…John…Ash…John…Ayers…" Grainy close-up photographs of long-dead miners begin to fill the scrim in a hazy projection. The naming of the dead continues ceaselessly, as the other sections of the choir file in and silently join the others on stage. The alarm sounds again numerous times, and each time the singers duck and flinch, a pre-meditated and coordinated gesture that nonetheless clearly communicates fright. After several long minutes of the chanting of names, the sopranos and altos join in singing a poetic description of the formation of coal deposits. Their overlapping entries float ethereally over the tenors and basses' continued roll call of the dead, the epochal timespan of geological process soaring above the fleetingness of human life.

Over the next hour, the music progresses through five movements, each reflecting on a different aspect of coal mining in northeastern Pennsylvania's anthracite coal region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: mining accidents and deaths, child labor, unions and organized labor, women's roles in family life, advertising and commercial uses of coal. The choristers' motions are minutely choreographed throughout the performance, both through subtle gestures while standing in place—a flick of a finger, a sweep of an arm, a tilt of the head—as well as through movements around the performance space, including throughout the audience. During two movements, the instrumentalists take on vocal soloist roles as well; foregrounded and amplified, they add another dimension of theatricality to the production. Throughout the performance, the projected visuals behind the performers comment upon the themes of each movement through archival photographs and videos of mining life; maps, blueprints, sketches and advertisements related to coal; and projected text and images drawn from the libretto. A stunned silence hangs in

the air at the conclusion of the performance before collapsing into applause. Former miners and their descendants are in attendance as well, and several of them express afterwards how moving they found the whole experience to be. It is a sentiment echoed by many in the chorus and audience alike.

Composer Julia Wolfe's *Anthracite Fields* premiered in four performances on April 26 and 27, 2014 in Philadelphia to critical acclaim, with David Patrick Stearns of the Philadelphia Inquirer in particular calling it "[Wolfe's] most attractive work yet" (Stearns 2014). Commissioned by the Mendelssohn Club choir and director Alan Harler, the work went on shortly thereafter to premiere in New York as part of the New York Philharmonic Biennial Festival, in a concert performance by the Bang on a Can All-Stars and Trinity-Wall Street Choir without the costumes, staging, and choreography of the premiere. Bang on a Can All-Stars and the Trinity-Wall Street Choir have since made a commercial studio recording of *Anthracite Fields*, while the All-Stars have taken the work on tour around the United States and globally, performing the piece with numerous professional and college-level chamber choirs. In 2015, the piece garnered Wolfe the Pulitzer Prize for music.

Anthracite Fields is, admittedly, the least clear-cut example of social practice composition of the three works examined in this dissertation. The final form of the music was, and was always intended to be, a choral work performed by professional and semi-professional musicians in concert. Wolfe herself framed the work as a story about labor history in America, and it continues to be discussed within the media largely in terms of its subject matter (Purdom 2014; Stearns 2014). My own introduction to *Anthracite Fields* came as a chorister with the University of Illinois Chamber Singers, when we performed the piece as part of its American tour.[9] I, too, thus encountered the

[9] Bang on a Can All Stars and University of Illinois Chamber Singers under the direction of Andrew Megill, March 3, 2017 at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in Urbana, Illinois.

piece first through its life as a concert work, with little knowledge of the many steps, documented in this chapter, that its original creators took to create an immersive, inter-disciplinary, and community-engaged production—steps that I contend point toward emergent concepts of social practice composition. This chapter, then, is not so much about the subject matter of *Anthracite Fields* as it is about how artists and participants created, performed, and experienced the piece during its premiere production, and articulated claims to community through that process.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that Wolfe, her collaborators, and Mendelssohn Club choir participants primarily understood community-building through musical creation as synonymous with "authentic" cultural encounter. Ethnomusicologists and other social scientists have long understood authenticity not as an inherent property of a cultural artifact, performance, or expression, but rather as a cultural construct; ethnographic studies of authenticity examine how individuals and societies in the present recognize the cultural signification of authenticity and put such signs to use (e.g., Peterson 1999; Muller 2002; Grazian 2004; Fiol 2010; Weiss 2014; Silvers 2015; Whitmore 2016; Turino 2018). I follow this approach by studying how the creators, presenters, and performers of one piece of contemporary Western classical choral concert music understood and experienced their own claims to community in their work together as a form of authenticity.

Specifically, I contend that Wolfe renders authenticity legible in *Anthracite Fields* primarily through constructing the musical score and text as an archive of historical signifiers of coal mining culture. Opening this chapter with an exploration of the origins and aims of the commission, I then borrow from ethnomusicologist Carol Muller's concept of "music composition as archival practice" (Muller 2002, 410) to examine how Wolfe's use of archival material frames the coal mining community as a community of the past, and how this choice authorizes her own position to mediate performers and audiences' encounters with that community. Secondly, through responses from Mendelssohn Club singers that I gathered during a focus group and survey in June 2019, I explore

how those archival signifiers, combined with the inter-disciplinary elements of the commissioning project such as staging, costumes, production design, and engagement events, contributed to choristers' own perceptions of the veracity of their own encounter with the mining community in performance. I contend that each performance of *Anthracite Fields* compels performers and audiences alike to inhabit the character and position of the historical coal mining community, creating a new imagined community (Ingalls 2018) in each performance founded upon a perception of empathy for and shared heritage with those affected by this chapter in America's labor history. To conclude, I explore some questions of ethics that arise from recognizing the types of inter-community relationships mediated by choral musical performance that Wolfe activates in her particular use of compositional social practice.

On the Road to *Anthracite:* Commission and Conception

Born in 1958, Wolfe received her Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Michigan in 1980 and her Masters of Music in composition from Yale University in 1986, studying with Martin Bresnick.[10] In 1987 along with composers David Lang and Michael Gordon, Wolfe co-founded the Bang on a Can Marathon—a day-long new music festival in New York City that the composers intended not only as a platform for their own compositions but as a way to break down entrenched hierarchies between different styles of contemporary Western classical concert music. As Wolfe recalled in a 1995 interview, "We put pieces together that were really strong and belonged to different ideologies or not to any ideology, defying category, falling between the cracks" (qtd. in Robin 2016, 12-13). The first Marathon concert proved to be a watershed moment in Wolfe, Gordon, and Lang's careers, as well as American contemporary classical music generally. Bang on a Can has since evolved into a large music presenting organization, supporting a full season of

[10] Wolfe later received her Ph.D. in composition from Princeton University in 2012. See Wolfe 2012.

concerts (including the annual Marathon), a commissioning fund for new works, several resident ensembles, a summer festival, a record label, and an outreach arm. In particular, the founding in 1992 of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, a new music[11] ensemble comprised of clarinet, cello, piano, guitar, bass, and percussion, represented a major step towards establishing a performance practice around their vision for what they termed a "post-ideological" musical style, which they conceived as the free combination of academic and vernacular musical influences (Robin 2016; Wolfe 2012).

This embrace of heterogeneous musical influences, as well as a do-it-yourself attitude to working outside established institutions of support, has continued to inflect these composers' own understandings and the public's perception of their work. Although all three now hold academic teaching positions (Lang at Yale University, and Wolfe and Gordon at New York University Steinhardt), the front page of their record label's website continues to describe their music as "too funky for the academy" (Cantaloupe Music n.d.). The use of amplification, "popular" instruments such as guitars, keyboards, drums, and electronics, and musical forms and stylings imported from folk, pop, and rock music genres have all to varying degrees featured in their collective body of work. Each composer, to be sure, has developed their own style; while Lang has often preferred working with mathematical relationships and sparse textures (Bliss 2008; Hubley 2015), and Gordon has become known for his multi-media works and spatialization of performers (Lewis 2018), Wolfe has frequently explored American Appalachian folk music and idioms in pieces such as *Four Marys* (1991) for string quartet, *Cruel Sister* (2004) for string orchestra, and *With a Blue Dress On* (2010) for five violinists. In Wolfe's own view, the most important predecessor to *Anthracite Fields* is her work *Steel Hammer,* written in 2009 for the early music vocal ensemble Trio Mediæval and Bang on a Can All-Stars. In that hour-long work, Wolfe drew on the texts and tunes of the over two-hundred

[11] I use the term "new music" here and elsewhere as it is generally used amongst Western classical musicians: to refer to musical works by living composers, as well as a performance practice and canon of works from approximately 1945 to present that embrace late modernism and post-modernism as an aesthetic.

archival transcriptions of the Appalachian ballad of John Henry, which tells the story of the eponymous railroad laborer who attempted to prove that he could beat a steam-powered machine at chiseling out a railway tunnel.

These vernacular influences on Wolfe's music were precisely what spurred Alan Harler, then artistic director and conductor of the Mendelssohn Club choir in Philadelphia, to approach Wolfe in 2010 about a new commission. Harler had been an avid supporter of commissioning new music throughout his tenure as artistic director[12], and was keen to support a work that would expand the purview of the choir beyond typical "slow and sustained" music to something more "raucous," specifically for the purpose of connecting with new audiences (Harler 2019). As Harler recalled to me: "In *Steel Hammer* you have folk music, classical music, and rock 'n' roll—very loud, metallic rock 'n' roll. And I loved that music in *Steel Hammer*. And I thought how could that ever possibly work with a chorus...would it work at all?" (Harler 2019). Harler approached Wolfe with this sound world in mind, and initially suggested they could hire Philadelphia-based rock musicians for the instrumental ensemble. Wolfe, however, insisted that Bang on a Can All-Stars would have to be involved from the work's inception in order to pull off a fusion of amplified music and choral singing convincingly.

During his final decade as Music Director, Harler had also developed a reputation for commissions that stretched the Mendelssohn Club outside the bounds of standard choral practice, through experimenting with staging, choreography, multi-media elements, and site-specific performance. Beginning with a staged performance of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* in 2006, Harler had established a close working relationship with choreographer Leah Stein and her professional dance company based in Philadelphia. Stein describes her practice as creating "site-specific dance

[12] The Mendelssohn Club counts 58 commissions under Harler's leadership. Harler retired in 2015 and remains Artistic Director Emeritus.

that enlivens a sense of place" (Leah Stein Dance Company n.d.). Harler and Stein went on to co-commission Pauline Oliveros' *Urban ECHO: Circle Told* (2008), which was presented at the University of Pennsylvania Rotunda with the chorus and dancers moving within and throughout the audience. Harler and Stein also collaborated on the premieres of David Lang's *battle hymns* (2009), presented at the 23rd Street Armory, and after *Anthracite Fields* on Byron Au Yong's *TURBINE* (2015), performed outdoors at the Philadelphia Water Works. *Anthracite Fields,* however, was to be their first (and ultimately only) collaboration where the chorus would take on full responsibility for executing Stein's choreography, without the support of professional dancers (Stein 2019). To add to the immersive experience, production designer Jeff Sugg—known for his work on Broadway musical theatre productions—was also brought on board to design a video projection that would run throughout the entire piece. Designer Katie Coble created the coal-printed tunics worn by the choristers and the white concert attire worn by the instrumentalists.

Neither Wolfe or Harler recall exactly how they settled on coal mining in northeastern Pennsylvania as the focus of the new commission, yet the topic clearly held both local and personal significance. Following the discovery of coal in Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century, mining became key to the history and economic development of both Pennsylvania and indeed the United States as a whole. Anthracite coal in particular was prized amidst the industrial expansion of the mid-nineteenth century because of its hardness and its energy efficiency compared to the softer yet more common bituminous coal. The coal region of northeastern Pennsylvania, encompassing three distinct coal fields stretching across Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Northumberland, and Schuylkill Counties, remained unique as it housed nearly all effectively mineable anthracite deposits in the United States (Aurand 2003, 13-16). As demand for coal grew, the expanding industry fueled the growth of both the railroad system and nearby industries and provided steady if dangerous employment to a growing population, particularly new Americans. Beginning with English and

Welsh immigrants, by the end of the nineteenth century Pennsylvania's coal country counted Scottish, Irish, German, Italian, Polish, Slovak, Serbian, Ukrainian, Syrian, and Lebanese miners and their families amongst its residents; considerable numbers of Black Americans were also part of the mining workforce (Miller and Sharpless 1985). Gendered division of labor was ubiquitous; men and boys worked in the mines while women and girls often took employment nearby in other industries such as textile and garment manufacturing (Wolensky 2006). In the 1920s, the demand for anthracite coal began to decline due to the emergence of cheaper fuel sources such as oil and gas, precipitating an economic decline as mines were closed and companies pulled out. This was only worsened by the onset of the Great Depression a decade later, and the region never fully recovered; anthracite mining effectively ceased by the early 1960s (Dublin and Licht 2005). A visit to the coal region today still reveals the scar of mining as shuttered mines dot the landscape and coal fires burn under the surface.

The history of coal mining in Pennsylvania evidently held great personal resonance for Wolfe and Harler as well. In an early artistic statement from 2012, Wolfe wrote, "the work has particular significance to me not only for the connection to my own American folk roots but also because both the research and performance are centered in the Pennsylvania region where I was born and raised" (Mendelssohn Club 2012, 5). In a documentary video produced by videographer and Mendelssohn Club member Richard Tolsma, Wolfe elaborated on this connection to her upbringing, telling how in order to get from her childhood home into the city, "you would drive down a small country road and then you'd get to route 309 and you'd head south. But if you took 309 and you headed north, which I almost never did, you would wind up in [coal] region" (Tolsma 2015). Wolfe again relates this fork-in-the-road story in her program note at the front of the score for *Anthracite Fields* (Wolfe 2014). Harler, too, spoke to me at length of his connection to the story of the piece, as his own father was a surface coal miner in Illinois (Harler 2019). Choristers also re-told

these stories about Wolfe and Harler's childhood connections back to me almost verbatim during my conversations with them, as these connections had clearly become an important rationale within the organization for undertaking the project. While Wolfe, Harler, and the choristers were all aware of the public resonance of coal mining history and its importance to Pennsylvania, it seems that the narrative about the creators' personal connections to the material was of equal importance.

Wolfe, for her part, was also interested in returning to a compositional practice she had begun in *Steel Hammer*, a practice which has been described as "mining archives" for musical material (Pew Center 2014). Wolfe envisioned the Mendelssohn Club commission as the second in a planned trilogy of works, each exploring a different story about the American worker and the impact of industrialization on American life.[13] While in *Steel Hammer* Wolfe had largely drawn on transcriptions of a single song preserved in physical archives, she anticipated that this new piece would rely more on oral history, including interviews with choristers and residents of Philadelphia with connections to mining history. Ultimately, Wolfe ended up partnering with theatre artist Laurie McCants to help realize this aspect of the project. In 1994, McCants—a resident of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania and co-founder of the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble—had written and directed a play entitled *Hard Coal* which drew upon stories and songs from local mining families. McCants hosted Wolfe on several visits to the region, sent her books and resources about mining history, and arranged introductions and interviews with former miners and their descendants. Wolfe's conclusion to her 2012 artistic statement about the piece perhaps encapsulates best what she hoped to accomplish throughout these efforts: "It will be the most public composition process in which I have engaged

[13] Wolfe has since completed the trilogy with a work for orchestra and female chorus entitled *Fire in my mouth*, about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in March 1911. *Fire in my mouth* was premiered January 2019 by the New York Philharmonic with conductor Jaap Van Zweden, featuring choirs The Crossing and Young People's Chorus of New York City, under the direction of Donald Nally (chorus master) and Francisco Nuñez (children's chorus). The work is a joint commission by The New York Philharmonic, Cal Performances at the University of California, Berkeley, the Krannert Center at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the University Musical Society at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

and I look forward to this ambitious work with a broad community of singers" (Mendelssohn Club 2012, 5).

The themes of storytelling, community engagement, and collaboration continued to appear prominently in early documents detailing the creators' vision for the work. A 2012 grant application to the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage's Philadelphia Music Project, for example, detailed how, "Research will include folk stories, text from traditional mining songs, personal stories from the chorus and the community at large through ancillary partners, thus providing rich opportunities for engagement." Bang on a Can All-Stars was characterized as a "chamber/folk ensemble" whose instruments would include "banjo, mountain dulcimer, mouth harp, and accordion." During the year leading up to the performance, the choir planned to run "story circle" events in partnership with First Person Arts, a Philadelphia-based arts organization whose mission is to "transform the drama of real life into memoir and documentary art" (First Person Arts n.d.). These events would be a place where miners, their descendants, and Philadelphia residents alike could share their connections to or memories of mining life, stories which would in turn inform or possibly become part of the libretto. The grant also detailed a year-long school curriculum initiative to be developed in collaboration with LiveConnections, an educational service organization that seeks to "inspire learning and build community through collaborative music-making" (LiveConnections n.d.). Finally, the grant writers envisioned the audience singing folksongs from the Pennsylvania coal region either prior to or as part of the performance itself. This was intended to align with the Mendelssohn Club's ongoing series of BIGSING events—audience singalongs of major choral masterworks—and here was described as bringing a "'campfire' atmosphere" to the piece. The grant writers concluded emphatically: "The project also provides a highly relevant and personal experience, in addition to being connective, that aligns audiences with community—a strong correlative for a 'community' chorus" (Mendelssohn Club 2012, 4-7).

The rhetoric of community voiced here by Wolfe and the grant writers speaks loudly. As we also saw in Chapter One, artists and funders are increasingly employing community-building as a powerful trope to justify the creation of new art. Yet in the case of *Anthracite Fields,* it seems that "community" was also a sincere expression of what the creators hoped to do with this project, an expression of the work that they hoped it would accomplish socially. The ways that their statements conflate ideas of personal heritage and memory, historical context and significance, and inter-personal connection into a web of positive associations points towards what they thought building community through creating new music might look like. It is worth noting that not all of these elements were incorporated into the final piece; while the story circle events and school curriculum initiative were implemented, Bang on a Can All-Stars retained their standard instrumentation without the addition of instruments from the American Appalachian folk tradition, and there was no audience singing as part of the premiere. Yet taken together, these statements all point towards a larger vision for the social purpose of the commission: to honor coal mining history while connecting communities of urban and rural Pennsylvanians to a sense of shared heritage through musical performance.

Framing the "Folk": Authenticity and Archival Practice in *Anthracite Fields*

For the remainder of this chapter, I unpack these overlapping threads of how community-building was imagined by the creators and original performers of *Anthracite Fields.* In doing so, I contend that the ways in which different groups of people became connected through the creative process of making and performing the premiere of *Anthracite Fields* becomes a legitimate site of analysis for understanding one possible performative meaning of the piece. If social relations, both imaginary and real, that are formed between people through the making of a piece of music are fundamental to the very conception of that piece, it follows that appropriate critical tools should be

brought to bear on analyzing those relations. Such an analysis is, I propose, a central tenet of the practice and scholarship of social practice composition.

In this section, I argue first that one lens through which community is both represented and valued in *Anthracite Fields* is as an archive—as a repository of cultural signs that signify a specific community (the coal mining community of Pennsylvania) but also more broadly in this case the emotional and ethical resonance of community itself. In employing "the archive" as a theoretical tool, I follow ethnomusicologist Carol Muller in her suggestion that we should "begin to consider certain kinds of music composition as archival practice: as constituting valued sites for the deposit and retrieval of historical styles and practices…" (Muller 2002, 410). Muller writes about African and Africanist styles in the works of certain African and European composers,[14] yet I examine the implications of her thesis as they apply more broadly to other works of Western art music, like *Anthracite Fields,* that use textual and musical archival materials from a specific culture or community. In doing so, I argue that such a work itself also becomes a musical archive that seeks to authentically represent the community it draws from.

Muller understands musical sound itself as a potential archive of signs of cultural authenticity, and she draws particular attention to the social use value of the archive—how the act of archiving simultaneously constructs the "authenticity of [a sign's] pastness" (Muller 2002, 425). As Richard Petersen reminds us, "authenticity is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered" (Petersen 1999, 3). Similarly, in his study of what he terms the "symbolic economy of authenticity,"

[14] Muller spends one-third of her article developing her concept of the compositional archive in relation to a piece of Western choral music—David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus*. I bring up this brief parallel not because I wish to argue that Wolfe was in any way influenced by Fanshawe (it is doubtful that she is even aware of this work), or that I wish to place her work in a similar artistic lineage. Rather, the process that both Fanshawe and Wolfe went through to gather textual and musical materials from cultural interlocutors for their works highlights certain common questions of practice that both pieces call attention to.

David Grazian further explains that "the search for authenticity is rarely a quest for some actual material thing, but rather for what consumers in a particular social milieu imagine the symbols of authenticity to be" (Grazian 2004, 34). Following these perspectives, I write about authenticity here as a quality conveyed upon, rather than present within, an object, sound, or sign, representing one way in which people put culture to use. With regards to the archive, that use value becomes apparent in the act of archiving itself, which constitutes an interpretation of the past through the lens of what is useful in the present. Archival practice conveys a contemporary authority upon an object, sound, or sign to stand on its own as an "authentic" representation of a community, past or present.

In light of this, it is worth examining how Wolfe chose to assemble and convey the archival materials that make up the libretto she compiled herself for *Anthracite Fields*: what types of textual or musical oral history she solicited from members of the mining community; what types she did not; how she drew upon other archival sources; and how her compositional choices framed all these materials as authentic encounter. I preface the section below with a table outlining the first-person and archival sources Wolfe used to create the libretto for *Anthracite Fields* (Table 3.1),[15] and continue with a descriptive analysis of how Wolfe framed those sources through her decisions about sound and performance.

The focal points of the opening movement, "Foundation," are two alphabetized lists of miners whose lives were lost to accidents in the region. Wolfe assembled these lists herself from a document entitled "Pennsylvania Coal Mining Accident Index 1869-1916," a secondary compilation of several primary sources assembled in 2007. In the first list, Wolfe chose only those miners with first name "John" and last names of one syllable. The tenors and basses intone this list in steady,

[15] My own reconstruction of Wolfe's use of these sources relies on her own account in the front of the score (Wolfe 2014), other public interviews, as well as my discussion with McCants (2019).

Table 3.1 Sources for *Anthracite Fields* libretto

Movement	**Source**
1. Foundation	
Alphabetical list of miners with first name "John" and last name of one syllable	Sherard, Gerald. 2007. "Pennsylvania Coal Mining Accident Index." Archives of the Denver Public Library. Names chosen and alphabetized by the composer.
Description of coal formation	Goodell, Jeff. 2006. *Big Coal*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Pgs. 8-9 liberally spliced and quoted by the composer.
Alphabetical list of miners with multi-syllabic names	Sherard, Gerald. 2007. "Pennsylvania Coal Mining Accident Index." Archives of the Denver Public Library. Names chosen and alphabetized by the composer.
2. Breaker Boys	
Text of "Mickey Pick-Slate;" coal region ballad	Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. 1999. *Growing Up in Coal Country*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Pg. 22.
Historical recollection of Anthony "Shorter" Slick	Rosenblum, Nina, dir. 1984. *America and Lewis Hine*. Boston: PBS.
Various children's rhymes	Contributed by the composer.
3. Speech	
Testimony by John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers	Lewis, John L. 1947. *Testimony of John L. Lewis before the House of Representatives subcommittee on miners' welfare of the Committee on Education and Labor, April 3, 1947 and subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Public Lands to investigate the Centralia mine explosion, April 17, 1947*. Washington, D.C.: Labor's Non-Partisan League. Pg. 19.
4. Flowers	
Interview with Barbara Powell, docent at Anthracite Heritage Museum, Scranton PA, and a miner's daughter.	Interview conducted by the composer.
5. Appliances	
List of electrically-powered daily actions	Contributed by the composer.
Text from first "Phoebe Snow" print advertisement	Created and published in 1900 by Earnest Elmo Calkins and the Lackawanna Railroad. Various online sources.

metronomic rhythm, while the sopranos and altos sing a more fragmented text about the geological formation of coal deposits, drawn from the book *Big Coal* by Jeff Goodell (Figure 3.1). Wolfe describes these two texts as representing the two "foundations" of the coal industry—geology and human labor. The second list, sung at the conclusion of the movement by all sections of the choir, features more individually striking names: "Massimino Santiarelli, Nicholas Scalgo, Edward Scutulis…"[16] Wolfe relates that this list was meant to highlight how recent immigrants in particular formed a sizeable proportion of coal industry workers throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In movement two, entitled "Breaker Boys," Wolfe sets to music a coal region ballad text which she most likely found in the young-adult non-fiction book *Growing Up in Coal Country* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti: "Mickey Pick-Slate, early and late, that was the poor little breaker boy's fate" (in Bartoletti 1999, 22).[17] Despite the prominent focus on folk music research in the early conception of the piece, this is notably the sole lyric in the libretto drawn from a musical or poetic form with historical ties to the Pennsylvania coal mining community. Wolfe composes her own tune for the text in upbeat, syncopated rhythms and a narrow ambitus, recalling the singsong register of children's rhymes. The jaunty tune is sung by Bang on a Can cellist Ashley Bathgate, doubling as an amplified vocal soloist and echoed in fragments and interjections by the choir (Figure 3.2).

[16] Quotations, here and elsewhere in the chapter, attributed to the libretto and score of *Anthracite Fields* can be referenced in Wolfe (2014).
[17] Wolfe does not directly cite this source in her libretto. However, amongst the written materials on coal history that McCants told me she gave to Wolfe, Bartoletti's contains this ballad fragment.

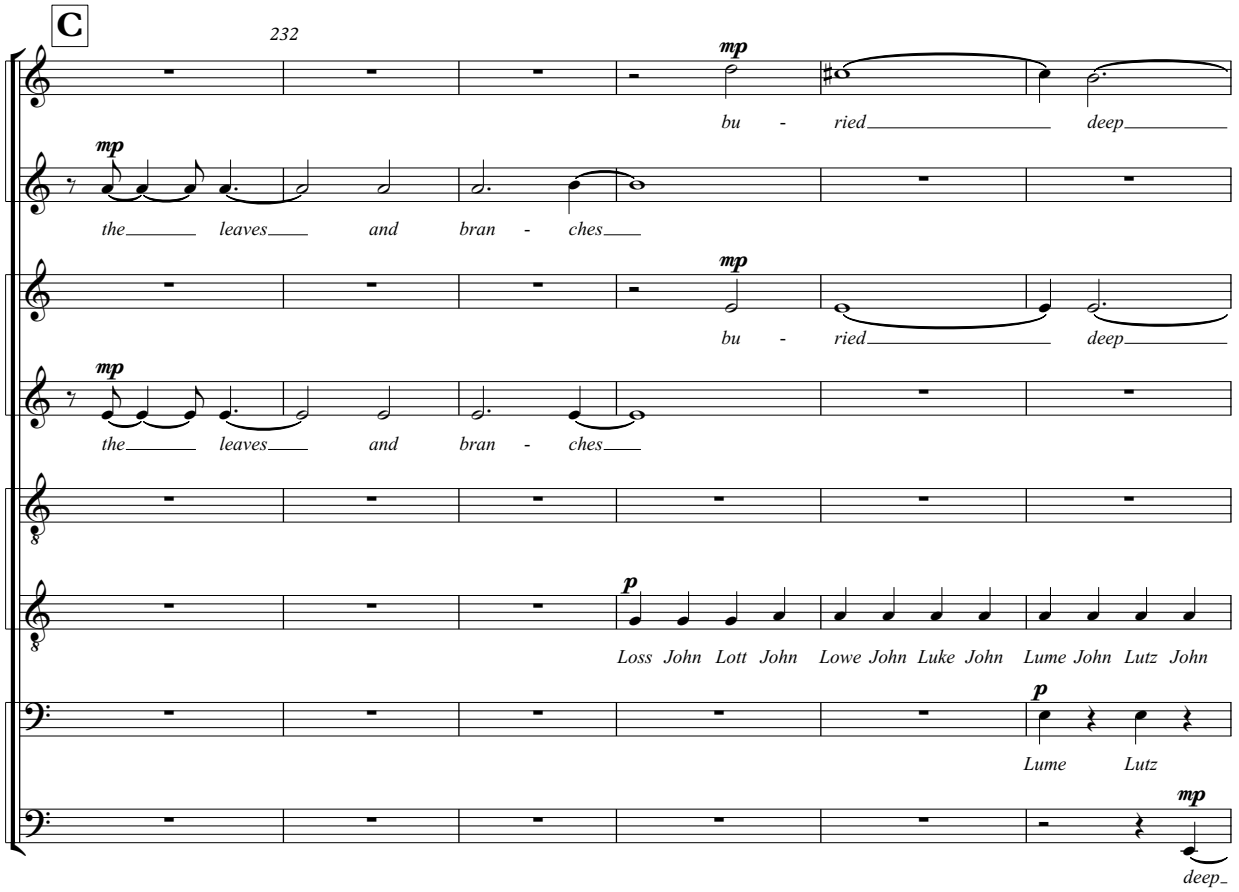


Figure 3.1 Julia Wolfe, *Anthracite Fields,* mvt. 1, mm231-236, vocal parts only.

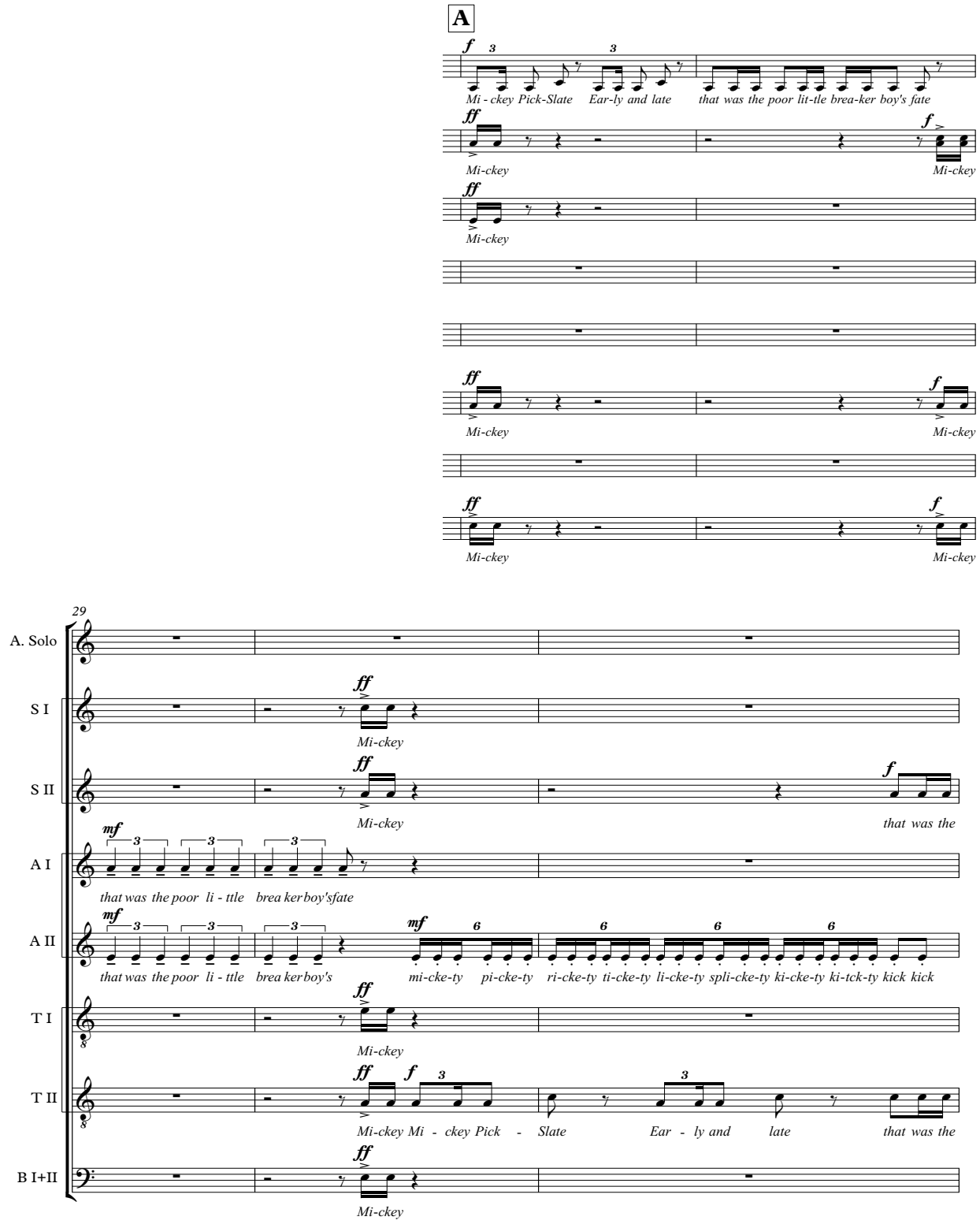


Figure 3.2 Julia Wolfe, *Anthracite Fields,* mvt. 2, mm 27-31, vocal parts only.

The first of two excerpts from oral history interviews also appears in the second movement. Wolfe sets Anthony "Shorter" Slick's account of his childhood working in the coal breakers (large conveyers where children worked picking impurities out of freshly mined coal), an account Wolfe transcribed from the 1984 documentary film *America and Lewis Hine* directed by Nina Rosenblum. Slick relates the horrors of the work, at one point describing how his fingers would "be bleeding every day." Wolfe again sets this text in dispassionate, methodical rhythms in the tenors, over a slowly evolving drone in the cello and bass. Much later, in the fourth movement entitled "Flowers," Wolfe has the sopranos and altos sing the words of Barbara Powell, a coal miner's daughter and docent at the Anthracite Heritage Museum in Scranton, Pennsylvania, taken from a first-person interview that Wolfe conducted herself. Powell emphasized how the women of the coal towns worked hard to add touches of beauty and civility to their family lives, recalling how "We all had flowers, we all had gardens" (Figure 3.3). Wolfe sets this text in a lyrical melodic style and triadic harmony, a musical aspect which was described to me by choristers as a relief from the dark subject matter and frenetic music of previous movements and a high point of the piece for many of them. Taken together, movements two and four emphasize that coal town life was family life, with all ages and genders taking on specific roles in industrial and family labor.

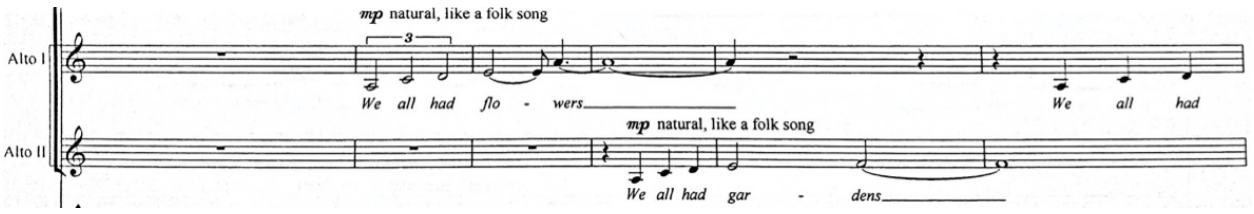


Figure 3.3 Julia Wolfe, *Anthracite Fields,* mvt. 4, mm 2-6, vocal parts only.

Movements three and five also form a pair, although this time one of contrast between the horrors of mining life emphasized by organized labor unions and the affluence of the coal-powered middle-class. In movement three, entitled "Speech," Wolfe has Bang on Can guitarist Mark Stewart take on the persona of labor leader John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers union between 1920–1960. Stewart sing-recites a testimony given by Lewis to the House of Representatives subcommittee on miner's welfare in 1947 as part of their investigation into the Centralia mine disaster;[18] Wolfe sets the text in fixed pitches but in largely improvisatory rhythm, while Stewart doubles himself on guitar and the tenors and basses echo his words in open fourth and fifth harmonies. The movement climaxes on a persistent ostinato of the words "That is what I believe" (Figure 3.4), while in Stein's choreography for the premiere the men marched into the audience. By contrast, the end of the final movement, entitled "Appliances," features text from an advertisement for the Lackawanna railroad. Here, the fictional railroad passenger Phoebe Snow, created by Earnest Elmo Calkins in 1900 for a series of railroad advertising campaigns, shows off how white her dress remains during her travels because anthracite coal burns so clean: "Phoebe Snow about to go / on a trip to Buffalo. / My gown stays white from morn 'till night / on the road to Anthracite." The disjunct ostinato in the vocal line as the piece slowly winds to a close seems to mirror the undulations of a train disappearing into the distance (Figure 3.5).

Finally, Wolfe contributes several texts herself to the libretto, including an assortment of generic children's street rhymes to conclude movement two (e.g., "I'm the king of the castle…"), as well as a lengthy list of common daily activities that require electricity ("bake a cake, drill a hole…")

[18] The Centralia mine disaster of March 25, 1947 claimed the lives of 111 people at the No. 5 mine in Centralia, Illinois. Lewis' testimony does not therefore in this context directly represent an event from Pennsylvania's anthracite region, and it seems the mining community of Pennsylvania also has a complicated history with Lewis as a figurehead (McCants 2019). The date of March 25 is also notable in the context of Wolfe's compositional output as it is also the anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City (1911), an event which Wolfe subsequently took as the subject of *Fire In My Mouth,* her follow-up to *Anthracite Fields* in her "Labor Trilogy" of works.

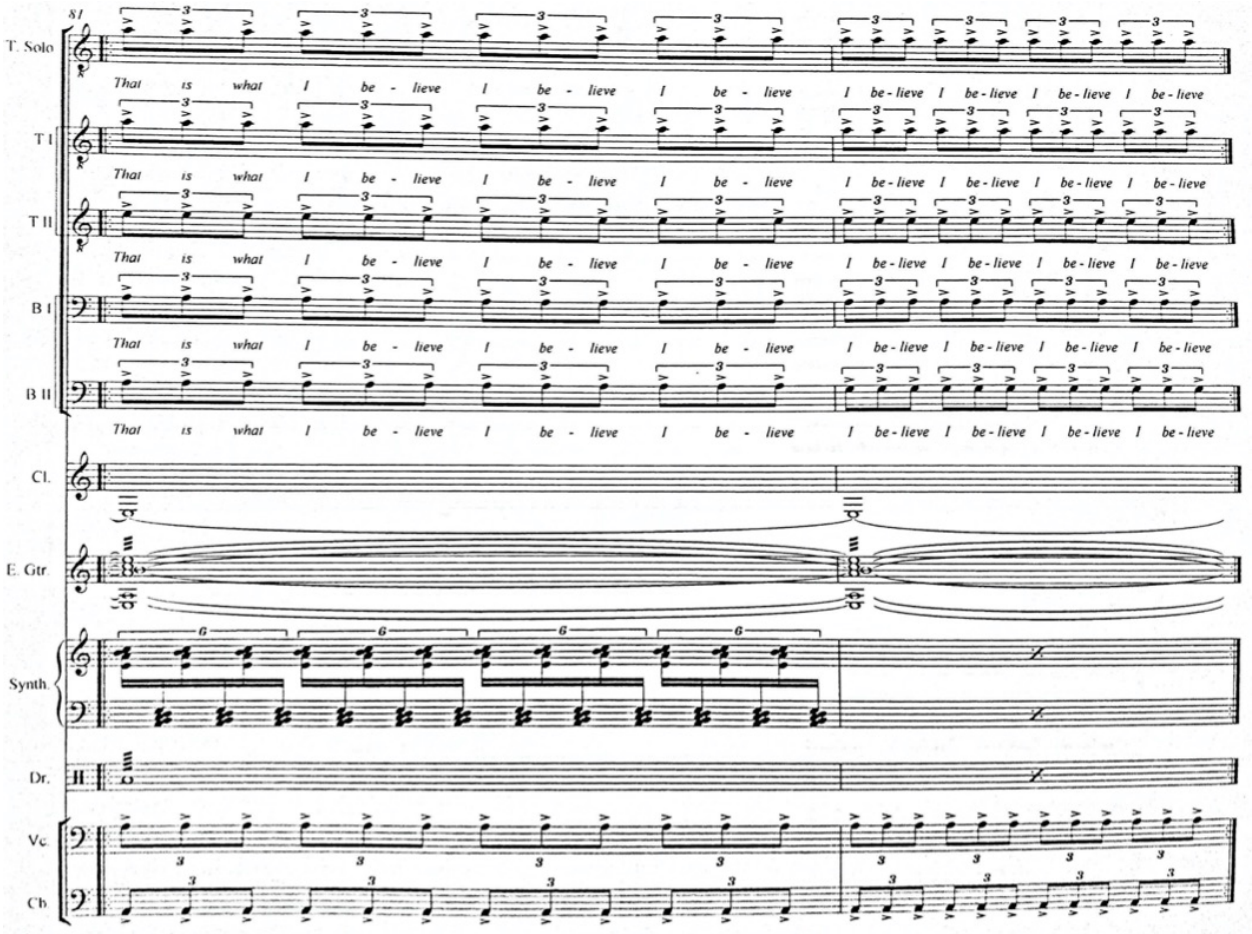


Figure 3.4 Julia Wolfe, *Anthracite Fields,* mvt. 3, mm 81-82. Full score.

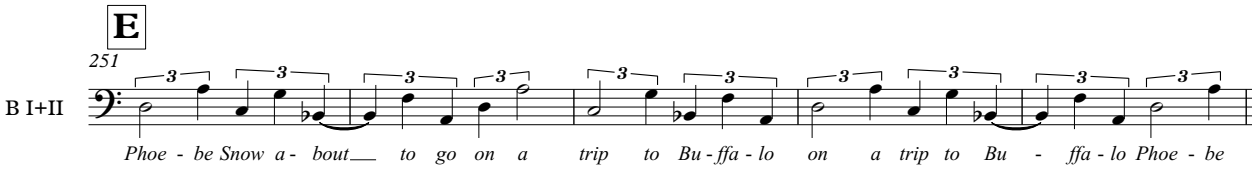


Figure 3.5 Julia Wolfe, *Anthracite Fields,* mvt. 5, mm 251-255, active vocal part (BI+II) only.

that the choir frenetically chants to open movement five. These texts seem to draw the audience into a personal association with the piece; by drawing them from her own life experience, Wolfe implicates herself in the history of coal's impact as well.

Most interesting among Wolfe's choice of texts is what she chooses not to use. Despite how the piece was initially conceived around research into stories and musical traditions from the Pennsylvania coal region, "Mickey Pick-Slate" is the only musical material in the work that draws from historical coal region culture. Even here Wolfe borrows only a ballad text, not a tune. While this particular choice could be attributed to transmission history—in Wolfe's likely source, the ballad is printed with words only, not in musical notation—Wolfe makes no other identifiable efforts in either her libretto or the score to reference any musical traditions other than her own. *Anthracite Fields* is entirely cast in the musical language of New York post-minimalism: tonal and modal harmonies; frequent use of ostinati; driving and energetic rhythms; borrowings from popular music influences; and fragmentation and repetition of text. While Wolfe's musical language is admittedly already a hybrid of numerous influences, that hybridity has already coalesced into a singular and distinguishable style. Unlike in *Steel Hammer, Anthracite Fields* offers little evidence to indicate that Wolfe attempted a "folk-classical hybrid" as mentioned in the grant application explored earlier.

Admittedly, the way that Wolfe and the grant writers initially framed *Anthracite Fields* in terms of folk music research had proven problematic early on. A first version of the Pew Center grant application, submitted in 2011, was evidently returned on the grounds of several instances that referenced "elevating" folk music through classical performance. The grant writers claimed that, "deconstructed, these songs will elevate 'folk' into a new reconstituted form," while Wolfe in an early version of her artistic statement referenced "creating an elevated and very new form of community singing experience" (Mendelssohn Club 2011). A grant reviewer, evidently with a background in ethnomusicology, had pointed out how this set up an unwarranted hierarchy between

musical genres, although this had not been the creators' intent (McCoy 2019). The choir's second grant application to the Pew Center, submitted in 2012 and excerpted earlier, removed this particular language and was approved, although it still relied heavily on the idea of incorporating Appalachian and coal region folk music into the final piece.

Whether or not this moment of misunderstanding played into Wolfe's decision to minimize the piece's perceived folk aspect remains conjecture. We can, however, consider the impacts of that eventual decision on how community and authenticity are otherwise signified in the piece. The majority of the libretto is drawn almost exclusively from secondary sources or archival documents, and Wolfe's use of these sources lends the piece a quality of objective fact rather than subjective encounter: the names of the deceased miners become a statistic in their unrelenting continuity; the Phoebe Snow advertisement conjures the spectre of crony capitalism; the description of coal formation evokes an elemental power. Despite the historical specificity of these moments, they also have the effect of de-personifying the piece. Rather than locating these particular facts of mining life within the context of an individual's lived experience or voice, Wolfe presents a birds-eye view, offering a thematic rather than a personified tour through the history of coal mining in Pennsylvania. While Wolfe's choices of thematic topics for each movement were informed by her fieldwork and research (McCants 2019), she most often chooses not to express those themes through the voices of coal country community members, or their own relationships to music and text as passed down through oral history. Instead, Wolfe locates the mining community firmly in the past, a past which is accessible through the archive and the guidance of the archivist—in this case, the composer.

In light of this tendency in the libretto, the three occasions where Wolfe does choose to use the words of an identifiable first-person source—the quotations from Anthony Slick in movement two, John Lewis in movement three, and Barbara Powell in movement four—deserve further

examination. Of these, Powell is the sole source from Wolfe's own fieldwork whose words feature in the final libretto; incidentally, Powell was also the first person whom Wolfe met in coal country willing to share her story for the project (McCants 2019). Of the remaining primary source quotations, Slick's comes from a documentary film, while Wolfe adapts Lewis' speech from an archival transcript. In each of these cases, the audience knows who the original speaker was, and whose voice the chorus is meant to represent.

Yet despite taking on the voice of these characters, choristers' performance of their words seems not to offer the opportunity for these characters to speak through the chorus. Rather, the chorus transforms their words into the voice of a collective. Part of this has to do with the register in which Wolfe presents each speaker's words. Slick speaks in the second person—"your fingernails, you had none," he says—and as the tenors and basses intone his words they implicate the audience in this collective "you" as well. Lewis takes on the responsibility to speak on behalf of all the miners, a collective character that the tenors and basses again portray as Wolfe has them chant Lewis' words back to him as if they are on a union picket line. Throughout his speech, Lewis alludes to the collective "they" of the miners, as well as the collective "we" of the American public; "If we must grind up human flesh and bones in this industrial machine," he says, and again the audience is indicted in this nightmarish vision. Finally, Powell explicitly offers a collective statement; "we all had flowers" she says, and the visual and sonic force of every soprano and alto singing these words seems to confirm the communality of her assertion.

Each of these moments performs an unexpected reversal, placing the performers and audience in the role of the mining community. Rather than encountering the voices of specific miners or community members in the music, the listener encounters a de-personified space in which they are obliged to imagine themselves. Wolfe's archival mappings create a sonic topography, establishing the veracity of the setting; Wolfe then populates that world with characters who are, in

fact, her singers and listeners. Both the highly general and factual qualities of the libretto aid in this sleight of hand. Because the listener has not been called upon to directly encounter the contemporary mining community in the piece, they are able to imagine themselves in place of that community. Wolfe's evocations of children's' street rhymes and electrically-powered actions—those parts of the libretto that Wolfe wrote herself—perform a similar task. By drawing on collectively shared cultural memory, they again invite the audience to place themselves inside the drama. These moments seem to ask: could those be my children?; how have I contributed to the coal industry in my own daily life?

Similarly, Wolfe's music itself remains, if not completely "objective," then certainly not overtly subjective. To be sure, moments of tone and text painting do occur: low tone clusters to represent the depths of the earth in movement one; rhythms that seem to emulate the skipping of children in movement two; fluttering textures like floating flowers in movement four; irregular rhythms that jump between instruments like static electricity in movement five. Each of these moments, however, depict very general images, the literalness of the musical-textual relationship seeming only to confirm their intended status as fact. Meanwhile, in much of the rest of the score Wolfe seems intent on presenting the text as directly as possible: the chanting of names of the deceased in steady half notes is deliberately statistical; the recitative-like setting of Lewis' speech is entirely in the service of declaiming the text; the Phoebe Snow advertisement set in an endless ostinato offers no comment itself on the ethics of the industry. Instead, Wolfe allows what words there are to speak for themselves, and they largely speak of facts. When they do speak of subjectivities, the subject is "ourselves." The "folk" in the music of *Anthracite Fields* is thus only those "folks" who would participate in a contemporary classical concert music experience—those who understand its rituals, its aesthetic proclivities, those who see themselves in it. Although they

are not the subject of the piece, they are the community that the piece speaks to, and in whose voice the music is cast.

Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino writes that "if the sounds we create come out of our own personal and family experiences, then they are *authentic* for us" (Turino 2018, 25; emphasis original). I write this analysis of the music and text of *Anthracite Fields* not to critique what the piece does or does not accomplish in terms of community engagement, but rather to reveal the style in which that engagement is rendered visible through performance. The ways that community, engagement, and authenticity are activated through Wolfe's choices of texts and musical setting reveals something of her own understanding at the time of what it meant to create community through a new choral composition. Wolfe's narrative about her American "folk roots" and her desire to investigate the unexplored possibilities of her childhood in rural Pennsylvania frames her entire fieldwork experience with the coal mining community. By imagining coal mining history as part of her own heritage as a Pennsylvanian and an American, she makes authentic engagement with the "other" legible both for herself and for her audience, opening up the possibility for them to imagine this story as part of their own heritage as well. While Wolfe's own first-person research makes only a small appearance in the final libretto, the knowledge that she undertook this engagement authorizes her in the public eye as a spokesperson for the coal community, as well as authorizing the public's own feelings of empathy that may emerge through the performance of the piece. Wolfe's use of archival materials creates the verisimilitude of her version of coal mining history, as the voices of the work's subjects are replaced by the authority of the archive and the archivist to mediate the listener's engagement with the past. The effect, ultimately, is that of fact—an authentic portrayal of history. As one chorister told me, "Her writing was very forthright and direct, but is very empathetic, not trying to project a particular point of view or something. It's just very empathetic by just telling things exactly as they happened."

Experiencing Empathy as Authenticity in Inter-Disciplinary Choral Performance

Rather than encountering the voices of the mining community in the piece, the music of *Anthracite Fields* is designed to translate their voices into those of the performers and audience. Yet why should this peculiar detachment, rather than direct subjective encounter, be experienced as empathy with another community by those who sang the premiere of the piece? To understand this process, I turn to the voices of the singers themselves. In their responses to me throughout my research, singers frequently located moments of inter-personal connection not simply in "the music itself," as sound, but in the entire production and process of creating the piece. In Chapter One, I argued that part of the purpose of defining social practice composition is to explore expanding definitions of the ontology of music to include the relations intentionally formed between performers and communities in the performance of a musical work. Here, I argue that singers in the Mendelssohn Club who premiered the piece indeed evinced a more holistic understanding of "the work" of the piece that considered the choreography, production design, music, and engagement events as all an integrated part of their own work to understand and embody the stories of the coal mining community in sound and on stage. Furthermore, I argue that the heightened affective experience of these many inter-disciplinary elements in performance enabled choristers' own understanding of the authenticity of their portrayal.

On a Wednesday evening in June 2019, I sat down with a group of six singers from the Mendelssohn Club at Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, one hour before their regular evening rehearsal. With the assistance of the chorus administration, I had asked them to come early that evening to share their recollections of premiering *Anthracite Fields*. Concurrently, I was also gathering reflections from other choristers via an online short-answer questionnaire, as a way to reach out to those singers who were not comfortable or available to speak in person. As I stayed through the choir's rehearsal that evening, many singers also came up to me unprompted at break

times, eager to have their opinions heard as well. Overall, I gathered perspectives on the project from a total of twenty-one singers, representing approximately one-sixth of those choristers who had performed in the premiere. Despite the intervening years, singers' accounts of the project and their performance were frequently vivid, detailed, and emotional. The process of bringing *Anthracite Fields* to life had clearly touched many choristers deeply.

One thread that emerged early on in our discussions and correspondence was that singers were acutely aware of how *Anthracite Fields* fit into the lineage of similarly immersive works that Harler had commissioned during his tenure, all of which had involved staging and dance developed in collaboration with choreographer Leah Stein. Evidently, the choir's increased responsibilities in executing Stein's choreography in *Anthracite Fields* had proven divisive amongst some choristers. As several singers told me, choristers expect to execute specific instructions from the score and conductor, while dancers are much more open to improvisation. Stein's technique of improvising choreography in rehearsal seemed a time-consuming and alien working method for some choristers.

Stein, for her part, seemed acutely aware of this creative tension when I spoke with her. Yet despite the challenges of working with non-dancers, she was still firmly committed to the added dimensions that movement had brought to the story:

> For me, it's about embodiment…through creating not only a story but also an experience. Like literally you feel like you're having an experience of this music, the place, the light, the space, the images, the movement. So it's activating the experience in a different way than just standing … I feel like you feel the people, you feel the person more, you feel the being, you know the person, you literally feel the person. (Stein 2019)

Whether or not each chorister enjoyed the choreographic process, those to whom I spoke concurred that Stein's staging, as well as Sugg's projections, remained integral to the meaning of their performance. Indeed, Stein's concept of their performance as an "experience" was echoed both literally and in related terms by many choristers. As one chorister pointedly told me, "I think had we

just done a concert performance of *Anthracite Fields*, it would have been, I don't want to say meaningless, but it would have had less meaning."

In response to a prompt simply to talk about moments that contributed to the meaning of their performance, choristers almost ubiquitously chose to describe how all three elements of music, visuals, and movement contributed to their sense of emotional connection to the themes and people portrayed in each movement. Of the repeated names in the first movement, one chorister recalled that "the repeated sound of John sounded to me like bells tolling at a memorial," while another equated it to a "dirge." Yet another referenced the act of performing in the dark from the beginning of the work, emphasizing that "because of the darkness and what we did, it really made you understand in a very personal way how what we have today—well, we are walking on the shoulders of these people who sacrificed to do it."

Choristers evinced empathy in different ways with the "characters" of each subsequent movement as well. Of the breaker boys in movement two, choristers spoke both of their acting and the "jaunty tune" that depicted the playing of the boys in the breaker. One said specifically that, "Once we were moving and acting out the children's responses to their situation it became more emotionally compelling." Another spoke of the impact of the photos of breaker boys, many of which were famously taken by photographer Lewis Hine, that were projected during the movement: "Every now and then that one picture of the breaker boys will show up related to some article, and it comes up and I'm like I would have had no connection. My connection to it is way different as a result of singing this."

Numerous tenors and basses who embodied the role of striking miners in the third movement recalled their staging most prominently. One chorister described excitedly how "we charged at the audience!" while another recalled that "we were basically right in [the audience's] faces!" Another chorister connected the form of the movement—chanting repeated text until a

climax—to his own shift in understanding of the role of organized labor today: "at the end of that movement where the men are singing forcefully in unison 'this is what I believe, this is what I believe,' that really packed a punch too. In that, you know, looking back in the context of 2019 America where unions have been eviscerated throughout the decades since then, you get a sense that back in the thirties that this was their only source of strength, they had no power other than banding together."

Sopranos and altos connected with the change of pace in the fourth movement, where they take on the roles of mothers and daughters of coal mining families. Singers specifically connected the change in the mood of the music to their empathy for the unnamed female characters they embody. One chorister recalled that "it was such a relief to sing something so much more melodic and so beautiful, but it was also so powerful to me because I saw the role of the women." Another recalled, "Singing it, I almost felt like I was in the role of one of those mothers, I could appreciate that a whole lot more." Finally, of the concluding "Appliances" movement, one chorister in particular recalled, "the whole 'run the dishwasher' thing, I can't tell you how many times I think of that when I put the little thing in and shut it. I think, oh yeah I'm using the dishwasher, maybe it's solar, maybe it's coal. I know that's five years ago, but I still think of that one today."

Alongside these feelings of increased understanding and empathy related to the music and their performance, choristers spoke of moments during the creative process that they felt contributed to inter-personal connection with actual people with ties to the mining community. Choristers spoke at length of a field trip they had taken together as a choir to the Anthracite Heritage Museum and Lackawanna Coal Mine Tour in Scranton, their own opportunities to meet former miners there, and the importance of that trip to their understanding of the source material of the piece. One specifically mentioned that she had not been able to make that trip but took a sick day off of work in order to make her own trip to coal country with her children. Choristers' belief

that they had performed for an audience of many people with connections to coal mining history was also strong. As one told me, "There was a lot of interaction, you know, the coal mining area is not that far away. I remember talking to audience people [who said] you know my father did this or my grandfather talked about this kind of stuff." While the Mendelssohn Club kept no record of precisely how many audience members may have had a personal connection to coal mining history, this seems not to have mattered to those choristers I spoke to. The fact that at least a few miners and their descendants attended was reason enough for their performance to be highly meaningful.

These quotations on their own are not meant to suggest a fixed meaning for the piece or any individual movement or moment in its creation. Taken together, however, they do point towards ways in which music, movement, spectacle, and engagement combine to create meaning in inter-disciplinary choral performance. Those choristers I spoke to and corresponded with wanted to talk about the complete experience of their performance. So far as they analyzed their work, each of these elements contributed equally to their sense of the affect and impact of their work. Choristers' responses also point towards the possibility that the added dimensions of theatricality and engagement that Harler and Stein actively pursued in *Anthracite Fields* did contribute to a heightened sense of connection to the subject material, and thus to the coal mining community itself, for choristers. Choristers believed that these added elements not only enhanced the storytelling experience but enhanced their ability to understand a community with whom many had no prior connection. Beyond the impact of these elements on the choristers themselves, many felt that they had a similar impact on the audience as well, providing, in the words of one chorister, "the potential to really impact people in a broader way, as they will walk away remembering things more vividly because of the darkness, because of the movement." In my conversations with Harler about the premiere, he too echoed the importance of developing choristers' sense of connection for the performance to be its most "honest." As Harler told me:

> That has something to do with connection. The more any individual personalizes the experience, the more the audience has to respond to. If the performers are on a certain level expressing themselves—on the level that comes with knowing the background, knowing the miners, having that kind of in-depth knowledge—the expression seems to be more honest, in that there is less standing between you and the audience and the music making. (Harler 2019)

I return to the term authenticity here to describe choristers' experience of connection to the mining community through their performance. Throughout all of their reflections with me, the sentiment that stands out is the veracity of their own feelings of empathy and understanding, feelings that were keyed both by Wolfe's use of archival sources and the inter-disciplinary elements of the premiere. Choristers believed they were presenting a true-to-life retelling of this particular chapter of American labor history and honoring a community in that process. Wolfe's use of the archive as a formal element in the piece enabled this understanding to emerge, while the additional inter-disciplinary aspects of the commissioning project and premiere performance affectively heightened choristers' own experience of encounter with the mining community.

Monique Ingalls uses the term "imagined community" to characterize the types of geographically disparate communities that might never meet face to face yet understand themselves to share a common belief or background expressed specifically through musical performance (Ingalls 2018).[19] I suggest, similarly, that choristers' responses point toward how Wolfe's music also creates an imagined community, specifically by calling those who perform and experience the piece to understand this story as part of their own. Rather than being solely about the mining community and its specific histories, narratives, or musics, I argue that *Anthracite Fields* is experientially about the community it creates in performance—a community united by a sense of shared heritage and empathy for this chapter in American labor history, and a community mediated by the authentic

[19] Ingalls specifically expands upon Anderson's concept of "imagined community" introduced in Chapter One. While Anderson theorized the imagined community as a way to describe how print media contributes to nation building, Ingalls expands the notion of community that the term speaks to include other self-identifying communities, and other media such as music, through which they recognize themselves.

resonances of the archive that calls it into being. *Anthracite Fields* explicitly asks performers and audiences alike to encounter an othered community on stage, to internalize that community as part of their own, and to understand that experience as authentic encounter.

Whose Community?: Aesthetics and Ethics in Professionalized Concert Performance

Choristers' responses all strongly point toward a holistic understanding of the concept of the musical work in the premiere of *Anthracite Fields*—a concept in which music, movement, and visuality purposefully combined to create a powerful feeling of authentic connection and empathy between themselves and the coal mining community. Yet reviews and subsequent performances of the piece suggest a different reception of the work within the broader choral and critical community, one that skews much closer to standard concert aesthetics of Western classical choral music. While choristers and audience members alike seemed ubiquitously emotionally moved by the immersive production based on post-concert surveys (Mendelssohn Club 2014), critical reception notably skewed the other way. David Patrick Stearns, in his review of the premiere for *The Inquirer,* characterized *Anthracite Fields* as "a major piece that doesn't require the elaborate production it was given at the Episcopal Cathedral" (Stearns 2014). Tom Purdom, writing in the *Broad Street Review,* went a step further in separating the production from the music: "The premiere was enhanced by a multimedia presentation…but the music and the words can stand by themselves" (Purdom 2014). These critics clearly intend to locate the meaning of the piece in Wolfe's music and libretto solely, not in the production of a multi-disciplinary performative experience of community connection and engagement.

Subsequent touring performances of *Anthracite Fields* have continued to incorporate Sugg's projections and lighting design, but have largely eschewed staging, choreography, and site-specific presentation. One month after the premiere in Philadelphia, *Anthracite Fields* received its New York

premiere as part of the New York Philharmonic Biennial music festival, with Bang on a Can All-Stars and the Choir of Trinity Wall Street performing under the direction of conductor Julian Wachner. The chorus performed in a traditional standing arrangement in a concert hall and went on to record the work for commercial release. With only one exception (Abrahams and Shaftel 2018), *Anthracite Fields* has been performed in this standard concert format throughout an extensive touring and performance history. At the time of writing, the work remains under exclusive license to Bang on a Can All-Stars, who contract with local choral ensembles as they tour the work. On at least one occasion, when presented with the option of large community-level choral forces or a smaller, pre-professional-level vocal group, Wolfe expressed her preference for the latter.[20] While there are many plausible and valid reasons for this preference—a smaller group with more Western classical training can meet the diction and rhythmic demands of the score, is easier to amplify, and fits in a smaller venue—the piece continues to stage concert aesthetics that are typical of contemporary Western classical art music. The chorus effectively takes on the same role as an actor in a play: to present these characters and stories in a way that is perceived as true-to-life—as authentic.

Many of these signs of professionalism also played into artists' and choristers' reception of the value of their work. When asked why it was important to commission this specific work, many choristers pointed first to Wolfe's reputation as a composer of Western classical art music—a reputation based on concert performance—as the most important reason for working with her. Choristers also spoke at length about the importance of commissioning new works, in particular the type of inter-disciplinary choral performances that Harler developed an affinity for throughout his tenure. In their minds, *Anthracite Fields* was first-and-foremost about extending the boundaries of choral practice, and community engagement was one way to accomplish this. When asked about the impact of the piece at large, many choristers independently chose to bring up Wolfe's Pulitzer Prize

[20] Personal correspondence with Andrew Megill, February 2018.

win. It became clear through my discussions with them that they too felt that they shared in this win, and that the recognition was of great importance to their sense of the worth of what they did. Several, Harler included, also brought up the repeat performances of the work as a concert piece, without all the staging, costuming, and outreach events. With new concert music, the concern is always that the work gets shelved, while repeat performances testify to its relevance. The extensive concert life of *Anthracite Fields* has clearly contributed to choristers' sense of having had a great impact on their own choral community. One comment relayed to me by a chorister perhaps encapsulates all of these sentiments: "I was not surprised the piece earned the Pulitzer and I was so proud of being a part of its genesis."

Yet while Wolfe herself, artists in the premiere, and singers in the Mendelssohn Club all had the chance to meet and get to know representatives from the coal mining community, the same cannot be said for most of these future audiences. While the piece has been performed in northeastern Pennsylvania coal country (Lackawanna Historical Society 2015), and audience members with ties to coal mining history have been known to attend other performances (Weininger 2020), it has largely been performed by musicians with few personal connections to coal culture for an audience with few personal connections to coal culture. Yet my own anecdotal evidence as a performer of *Anthracite Fields* in concert myself suggests that performers and audiences continue to feel a powerful sense of connection to the mining community and each other through performing the work. The imagined community the work creates in each performance is still palpable due to the performative significations of authenticity that Wolfe writes into the score, despite each subsequent performance not involving the same efforts at actual community engagement as the premiere. Such performances give us the opportunity to question both the mechanism through which the piece authorizes such a feeling of encounter, as well as the choices we have as choral practitioners in relation to this practice.

In an analysis of intercultural art music by indigenous composers, Stó:lō scholar and artist Dylan Robinson writes, "it is important to ask precisely *what* particular methods of collaboration enact a crossing of borders in the first place and *how* such border crossings effect the everyday lived encounters of those musicians who take part in performance or those audience members who witness the performance" (Robinson 2012, 114). While Robinson writes specifically about how reconciliation between indigenous and settler cultures is sounded and heard in musical artworks, I suggest that such an inquiry is also worthwhile with pieces of music that purport to perform an exchange between other cultures or communities as well, including those that are defined more by class or geography than by ancestry or heritage. Robinson's critique invites us to ask about musical works that claim to perform inter-personal encounter, particularly when such encounter is registered as "authentic:" what kind of encounter was actually performed? Do singers and audiences who meet *Anthracite Fields* in concert in fact experience the same degree of understanding and connection with the mining community that the Mendelssohn Club singers experienced, or that a piece that placed members of the mining community themselves on-stage might be able to accomplish? What aspects of community may be lost as *Anthracite Fields* becomes commodified so it can tour more easily and fit within the industry expectations of Western classical art music?

I do not purport to be able to answer these questions definitively here. Rather, I pose them as challenges to future practice. The ongoing concert life of *Anthracite Fields* demonstrates how the "professionalized" aesthetic of standard choral practice leads to certain value judgements in relation to performance. An aesthetic of "community," rather, may lead to others. If there is a thread running through the multiple sections of this chapter, it is how the tension between these two was resolved in varying ways through the various creative decisions made throughout this work's creation and premiere.

Singers and audiences continue to feel something profound when they sing or listen to *Anthracite Fields* because they recognize themselves in it. Yet, if it is to be a piece that is about encounter with another community, we must question how the aesthetics of performance can either enhance or preclude the type of encounter meant to take place. In order to fully embrace the stories and the people that form its basis, *Anthracite Fields* is perhaps a work that demands not just to be performed, but for performers to be immersed in—physically, historically, emotionally, inter-personally.

Conclusion

Admittedly, *Anthracite Fields* bears fewer parallels to social practice artworks of the three works considered in this dissertation. The outcome of the commission was a piece of concert choral music, and such was the commissioner's and composer's intention from its conception. The aesthetics of professionalism pervade the piece from start to finish; the piece is under exclusive contract to Bang on a Can and has most often been performed on tour with pre-professional or professional choral ensembles. Yet, as I have argued throughout this chapter, a large part of what made the piece understandable and meaningful for the chorus were those parts that inched towards a more forthright social practice as the project developed. These were things that developed because they seemed like the right thing for the work's creators to do at the time—visit mining communities, hear their stories, learn their history, connect with them in the audience, try to embody their feelings and stories in performance through music, movement and visuals. These were also the aspects of the project that made the premiere a unique and fundable exploration of contemporary choral practice and enabled a public understanding of authentic cultural encounter to emerge through the performance of the piece.

I do not know how many people within the coal mining community itself *Anthracite Fields* has impacted or continues to impact. While the Mendelssohn Club's own anecdotal evidence suggests that many people with ties to coal mining heritage participated in interviews, ancillary events, and attended the performance, there is no systematic record or substantial base of evidence through which to evaluate this organizational narrative. Few records were kept as well of the "story circle" events and school curriculum mentioned earlier in this chapter, events which actually allowed community members to engage creatively and expressively with the source material of *Anthracite Fields*. In terms of project outcomes and reporting for funding purposes, it was simply enough that these events happened, and in that sense, they did perhaps remain "ancillary" as opposed to firmly integrated within the concept of the project.

Yet when the piece was performed for the first time for an audience in coal country, hosted by the Lackawanna History Society, the society included the following in their remarks about the piece: "Too often in [Northeastern Pennsylvania], people look back on this history with a negative feeling, but by presenting a musical piece that was created out of that same story, local residents can be encouraged to take pride in their past and celebrate our Anthracite legacy" (Lackawanna Historical Society 2015). If, indeed, the society could be said to speak representatively for some in coal country, then this statement suggests that having one's stories told on stage by artistic professionals in a highly aestheticized way can be an affirming experience.

Perhaps there is a hypothetical version of *Anthracite Fields* that would have involved the mining community in a more collaborative process of telling their own story through music, through a piece that would both sound relatable to them or even be performable by them—a platform for them to tell their own stories. But that, perhaps, is a different piece of music. To the extent that Wolfe and the creative team behind *Anthracite Fields* engaged honestly and extensively with the coal mining community, and those coal-region culture bearers who participated and shared their stories

did so openly and of free will, *Anthracite Fields* remains an important study in the progression toward a forthright compositional social practice and the impetus for its development. A close examination of the creative process behind *Anthracite Fields* reveals some of the choices that musicians have available for the aesthetic framing of the stories of others in inter-disciplinary choral performance, and invites musical creators to make those choices consciously and in consultation with the community whose stories they are telling.

CHAPTER 4

COMMUNITY AS SOCIAL CAPITAL: DAVID LANG'S *CROWD OUT* IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

"I sing the city. Fucking city. I stand on the rooftop of a building I don't live in and spread my arms and tighten my middle and yell nonsense ululations at the construction site that blocks my view. I'm really singing to the cityscape beyond. The city'll figure it out."
—N.K. Jemisin, "The City Born Great" (2018, 14).

The fall air is brisk, yet the sun shines warmly as the mid-afternoon crowd begins to gather in Chicago's Millennium Park.[21] On the face of it, this could describe just about any day in the iconic park at the heart of downtown Chicago, where tourists flock daily to photograph their distorted reflections in the curved and shiny surface of artist Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate sculpture, affectionately known to locals as The Bean. Yet on October 1, 2017, the crowd is uncommonly large, and purposeful. A small, raised platform has been erected in front of the sculpture, and the eyes of many congregating here are fixed on the three people who occupy this temporary stage: conductor Donald Nally, co-conductor and organizer Tim Munro, and assistant conductor AJ Keller. Conductors and crowd members alike have been rehearsing together for months in smaller groups spaced out across each of the city's fifty electoral wards under the coordination of Illinois Humanities, a state-wide arts and humanities advocacy organization. Today, they have gathered en masse to perform the United States and North American premiere of composer David Lang's *crowd out* (2014)[22]—for one thousand voices shouting and singing—as part of the 2017 Chicago Humanities Festival.

[21] This vignette is a reconstruction based on video footage of the Chicago premiere of *crowd out* (Chicago Humanities Festival 2018) and my own interviews with organizers of the event. I was not a participant at the time.
[22] Throughout this chapter, I use Lang's preferred stylization of no capital letters in the titles of all of his works. *crowd out* was originally commissioned by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the Berlin Philharmonic, and the Spitalfields Music Festival, and had three separate European premieres organized by each one of these organizations in June 2014.

Three o'clock p.m. rolls around, the supposed start time of the performance. Yet nothing in particular happens. People mill about the park seeming to do their own thing, while the three leaders at the center bemusedly yet intently watch, listen, and wait. David Lang himself flits amongst the various groups of attendees. Gradually, an audible murmur begins to grow from within the crowd; individual speakers are reading a series of phrases off of a half-page script, each in their own time and with long pauses between each phrase. The murmur steadily builds in volume as more join in, yet the speakers make no attempt to coordinate with each other. As if isolated in their own worlds, they recite each sentence alone: "I draw deep breaths…I feel more confident and calm…I lost it all…"

At first, it is difficult to distinguish who is purposefully taking part in the performance, and who is an unsuspecting passerby drawn into it. Yet the distinctions matter little, and this blurring of roles seems to be a part of the point of the piece. A few onlookers decide to join in, glancing over other peoples' shoulders to follow along with the script. Several people throughout the crowd are performing the phrases in American Sign Language.

The role of the trio of conductors soon becomes clear. After several minutes of the murmuring building in intensity, Keller holds up a blue sign, while Munro holds up a sign with crescendo and decrescendo markings printed on it. Nally raises and lowers his arms, and about a quarter of the crowd—those participants who have been instructed to respond to the blue signs—deliberately follow his lead, growing louder and softer in their speaking. Over the next few minutes, as Keller holds up more signs of different colors, more sections of the crowd join in with the gradations in speaking volume, until the amorphous sound mass builds into a din of dovetailing dynamics. One by one, people begin prominently accenting the first word of each line of text in Lang's libretto even more loudly—the word "I." In emphasizing the word, they make their individual presences within the crowd known: "I start to panic…I feel so alone I could cry…I start

to sweat…" The mounting chaos builds to a climax on four words which, under Nally's guidance, the entire crowd manages to shout together in unison: "I. . . . . am. . . . . always. . . . . alone."[23]

crowd out proceeds in this way for the next forty minutes as the rest of Lang's libretto—which he compiled himself from results from an internet search engine query for the phrase "When I am in a crowd, I…"—unfolds in sections of text alternately spoken, shouted, and sung. At several points, other small-group leaders emerge from within the crowd. Armed with plastic megaphones, they shout a phrase out into the crowd, and the phrase is echoed back by those fifty-or-so participants assigned to follow them. At other times, the three central conductors continue to exert more specific influence, motioning for a new section of the piece to begin or for dynamic gradations to occur again in different sections of the crowd. At two distinct moments in the piece, Lang provides a melody for the crowd to sing, always in loose forms of canon with other groups within the larger gathering. As different groupings of people coalesce and dissipate in sound and collective action throughout the performance, the performance seems to dramatize the tension between the autonomy of the individual and the community that they collectively form. As Lang writes in his preface, this was an explicit purpose of the work: "My interest is strictly on the individual—what is it that we gain by joining with others, what is it that we lose? How does the innate, overwhelming nature of the crowd 'crowd out' the things we are each most committed to, as individuals?" (Lang 2014a, "notes" 1).

It is, admittedly, a stretch to call David Lang's *crowd out* choral music in the traditional sense. As a large-scale participatory event, the work holds much in common with certain aesthetics of public performance art, as well as the aims of social practice art encountered in Chapter One, such as social critique and an interest in the social structure of artistic participation and performance.

[23] The extra-long ellipses here are used by Lang in his score for *crowd out*.

Many observers and participants have also commented on *crowd out*'s similarity to a flashmob[24], and while the performative resemblance of the piece to a flashmob is striking, Lang himself has disavowed any similarities (Lang 2020).

Rather, every past performance of *crowd out*—including the 2017 American premiere in Chicago that is the focus of this chapter—has been organized and directed by professional choral artists and involved the participation of established amateur choral organizations, in many ways representing an outgrowth of the choral performing arts broadly conceived. Through *crowd out,* Lang offers a commentary on the idea of "community" that so many of these types of choral organizations espouse in their activities, mission statements, and membership. As Lang notes in his score, "We can get a sense of community and strength from being part of a crowd, and often the environment of the crowd helps to shape how we feel about the purpose that brought us all together within it" (Lang 2014a, "notes" 1). Indeed, at least some of the participants in the Chicago performance seemed to share in this understanding. On Twitter on the day of the performance (October 1, 2017), for example, @MaestraOlivia wrote, "This kind of event puts the #unity in #community," while @MsCiaraEvans captioned several photos of the event with the simple phrase "Music is Community."

Throughout this chapter, I argue that the ideal of community implied by Lang in his score and explicitly taken up by the organizers of the Chicago performance strongly corresponds to the theoretical model of community as "social capital." In introducing the term social capital, I draw on the work of sociologist Robert Putnam, who defined social capital as the strength and quality of the ties that connect individuals within a social network (Putnam 2000). Following a literature review of the use of social capital theory in music research and an overview of David Lang's style and choral

[24] A flashmob is a public performance event in which participants, usually organized through the internet, descend rapidly on a public location to give a loosely scripted public performance, generally without rehearsal, before quickly dispersing.

works, I then trace the origins of the Chicago performance of *crowd out* through interviews with artists and organizers and offer an analysis of how Lang's score structures participants' musical and social experience in performance. In doing so, I demonstrate how artists and organizers voiced core concerns of the social capital thesis throughout the making of American premiere, and how the specific musical features of *crowd out* related to its scale, text, and dramatization of inter-personal connections enabled this specific meaning of community to be recognized in performance.

In making this argument, I demonstrate how a key principle of social practice composition is to foreground homologies between musical structure and social structure, in order to make social commentary possible through performance. I introduce *crowd out* here as a case study in social practice composition for two reasons. First, Lang's concern throughout the work with configuring human bodies and relationships through musical means serves, in fact, to *perform* the central tension between individual autonomy and collective purpose that Lang highlights as his core concern in the work; participants are compelled to experience this tension through their performance of the work. Second, my ethnographic interest in the Chicago performance in particular stems from the stated aim of the producing organizations, Chicago Humanities Festival and Illinois Humanities, to create a performance that could be seen as truly representative of the entire city of Chicago. To accomplish this, organizers specifically assembled their thousand-voice-strong choir from citizens drawn from each of the city's fifty electoral wards. In the process, organizers sought to build and activate social networks across the city, not only in an effort to represent the demographics of the city on stage but also to create what they hoped would be lasting connections between individuals and organizations throughout the city through collaborative artistic creation. Such an aim, I argue, represents an intentional realization in musical performance of the ideals of the social capital thesis.

Social Capital in Theory and Musical Research

The concept of social capital provides a valuable analytical tool for grounding the study of community in social fact—namely, in the social connections formed between individuals within a specific social network. While the term has been coined independently several times within the literature (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1990)[25], my use here follows that of sociologist Robert Putnam, as introduced in a 1995 article on the topic and culminating in his expansive study *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). In *Bowling Alone,* Putnam defined social capital as "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, 19). Like other types of capital (e.g., financial, cultural), social capital can be seen as a form of currency, as the number, strength, and quality of one's connections to others affords an individual the opportunity to make other connections, increasing the value of these connections overall. Unlike financial capital, however, Putnam clarifies that social capital is not something that is possessed by individuals, but rather is located within the mutual ties forming the social networks that they participate in.

Putnam was concerned with the perceived decline of civic engagement in the United States over the second half of the twentieth century, and by exhaustively compiling quantitative studies of this phenomenon sought to provide "hard evidence that our schools and neighborhoods don't work so well when community bonds slacken, that our economy, our democracy, and even our health and happiness depend on adequate stocks of social capital" (Putnam 2000, 27-28). Throughout *Bowling*

[25] Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theorization of social capital is perhaps better known in some fields than Putnam's, and I acknowledge it here specifically. Bourdieu and Putnam largely agree on their overall definition of social capital (the resource potential of networks of inter-personal relations); however, Bourdieu was primarily interested in social critique, while Putnam's interest was more pragmatically to contribute to the revival of community bonds—a project foundational to the academic tradition of American communitarianism of which Putnam is frequently seen as a key member. I do not propose that this chapter is explicitly communitarian in its aims, yet I use Putnam's theorization throughout because its connections to discourses of civic development make sense within the context of a large-scale, civic choral performance. Putnam's work is also the most frequently cited in other musical scholarship on choirs and social capital referenced in this chapter. For a summary of the conceptual history of social capital, see also Farr (2004) and Prest (2016).

Alone, Putnam clearly links the health of a community to the accumulation of social capital—to the strength of how networked a community is overall—and goes so far as to declare community and social capital to be "conceptual cousins" (Putnam 2000, 21). While Putnam neglects to clarify his definition of community itself, he implicitly theorizes community-building as the growth of networks of social capital, and the act of furthering social capital as an inherent public good.[26]

In *Bowling Alone,* Putnam defines two types of social capital: bonding social capital and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital, which he colloquially refers to as a "sociological superglue" (Putnam 2000, 23), refers to ties among individuals that evoke a sense of solidarity and "sameness" within social groups. Bridging social capital, on the other hand, are relations that act as a "sociological WD-40," allowing people to connect across social stratifications and providing "linkage to external assets" (Putnam 2000, 23) such as new employment opportunities or new social supports. Other scholars in the communitarian tradition of social capital research have since added the concept of "linking" social capital, which emphasizes the social connections between different levels of hierarchical organizational structures (Woolcock 2001). These analytical categories provide useful tools for classifying and comparing the character of "networked-ness" afforded by different social environments and participatory activities.

Social capital has made sporadic but steadily growing appearances in musical scholarship. Ethnomusicologists have used social capital to explain individuals' social motivations in specific musical contexts, such as which gigs to take (Cottrell 2004), which social dance events to attend (DeWitt 2009), which instruments to purchase (Wiebe 2018), and which musical genres to support (Dowling 2008). Ethnomusicologists have also emphasized how community participants understand, access, and use social capital through their participation in specific group musical activities (Graves

[26] On social capital as a public good, see Julien (2014). On theoretical distinctions between community and social capital, as well as Putnam's conflation of the two, see Colclough and Sitaraman (2005).

2005; Bithell 2014; Bartolome 2018b; Harrison 2020). Music education scholars have often gone one step further in advocating for the re-examination and re-structuring of certain musical practices in service of activating greater potential for social capital generation (Jones 2010; Langston 2011; Wright 2012; Prest 2016).

Amongst forms of group musicking that have been considered in the literature, choirs are often highlighted for their potential to build social capital, perhaps because of the implicitly social nature of the chorus. Putnam himself in an early case study singled out participation in a choir as a possible vehicle for building social capital (Putnam 1994), while more recent studies in music education have empirically studied how participants experience and understand social capital acquisition in a choral context (Langston and Barrett 2008; Langston 2011; Moy 2015; O'Flynn 2015; Barrett 2017; Bartolome 2018a). In her ethnography of the natural voice community choir movement in the United Kingdom, ethnomusicologist Caroline Bithell summarizes the impact of such studies on Western cultural understandings of the social purpose of choral singing, particularly how social capital relates to discourses of inclusivity and representation:

> the more inclusive a choir is in bringing in members, the more people will reap the full panoply of rewards associated with singing on the one hand and group belonging on the other. At the same time, if we follow the logic of the social capital thesis, those to whom the choir reaches out via its performances will also benefit. By extension, the nature of a choir's performing activities and the manner in which it engages its audience—including the places and contexts in which it performs—are another indicator of its inclusivity and the degree to which it may be seen as truly representative of the local community. (Bithell 2014, 224)

As Bithell and other cited above make clear, increasing opportunities for participation in group musical activities in turn increases the efficacy of the activity in furthering networks of social capital to which the participants involved have access, which in turn contributes to the overall perceived

strength of a community.[27] Attending to how a musical event or practice fosters inclusion and participation is thus a key concern of the social capital thesis in a musical context.

It is not my intention in this chapter to empirically document whether participants in the Chicago performance of *crowd out* experienced, or thought they experienced, an increase in social capital as a result of their participation. Rather, I contend that social capital theory offers one useful conceptual model for understanding what is meant by the term "community," and that this particular meaning of community was both implicitly and explicitly invoked both by Lang and the organizers of *crowd out* Chicago in their own understandings of the piece and their reasons for making and performing it. As a large-scale, civic musical event, *crowd out* in Chicago highlighted the ways in which participatory performance can be imagined as a means of generating social capital and thus reinvigorating a sense of community within the city—a sense of community that even now, twenty years after Putnam's writing, many still feel like is being lost and that the arts have an active role to play in reclaiming.

David Lang: Style and Choral Works

We already met David Lang briefly in the previous chapter alongside Julia Wolfe and Michael Gordon, with whom Lang shares a long-standing professional affiliation through Bang on a Can. Born in Los Angeles, California in 1957, Lang began his undergraduate education at Stanford University originally as a chemistry student. Although he had some composition lessons as a younger teenager, it was not until meeting and studying with composer Martin Bresnick at Stanford

[27] My account here explicitly does not take into account the related idea of cultural capital, principally as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu (1986). A choir could very well acquire greater cultural capital through its performance of specific music, even for a small niche audience, due to the classed perception of different genres, styles, and pieces of music. However, in considering social capital as the sum total and quality of connections made by social actors within a network, the linkages between the participatory potential of a musical activity and its ability to generate social capital become apparent.

that Lang decided to take the leap into composing full time. Lang earned his master's degree in composition in 1980 from the University of Iowa studying with composer Martin Jenni, and went on to earn his doctorate at the Yale School of Music again under the supervision of Bresnick as well as composer Jacob Druckman (Hubley 2015). As we have already seen, Lang met Gordon and Wolfe during his time at Yale, leading to the founding of the Bang on a Can Marathon in 1987 and its growth into a multi-faceted organization for the presentation and promotion of new Western classical art music in New York City and throughout the United States. Although he composes prolifically for major classical and new music ensembles worldwide, Lang and his music continue to remain prominently associated with Bang on a Can.

Lang's music has often been categorized as "post-minimalist" by scholars and critics, in reference to his penchant for generating musical forms and material from repetitive and mathematical structures (Bliss 2008; Hubley 2015). Composer and musicologist Kyle Gann describes post-minimalism as "an idiom of mostly diatonic tonality, usually with a steady and sometimes motoric beat. Often the music is written according to strict contrapuntal or rhythmic procedures, with an underlying numerical structure" (Gann 1997, 325). Post-minimalism as a genre emerges out of the concerns of American minimalist composers, such as Steve Reich and Phillip Glass, for whom the audibility of the underlying structures and processes in a piece was paramount. Building from this orientation to musical material, post-minimalism considers process as but one element of a composition upon which other layers of reference and meaning can be grafted—a compositional tool which can be harnessed for expressive purposes. Lang himself speaks to this tension between process and expression in his program note for his percussion quartet *the so-called laws of nature:* "Do the numbers themselves generate a certain structure, creating the context and the meaning and the form, or are they the incidental by-products of other deeper more mysterious processes?" (Lang 2002, 1).

For his own part, Lang resists the labeling of his music, choosing to see his own stylistic evolution as an exercise in self-exploration rather than an adherence to a specific musical philosophy. In an interview with *Border Crossings* magazine, Lang comments:

> Music is my tool for getting at the things I want to know about myself…I'm not that interested in what these pieces sound like. I want them, especially pieces that have text, to be true to their texts, and I've never tried to set up a text because it is going to lead me some place where I can make a beautiful sound. (Border Crossings 2016, 74)

Lang's interest in the compositional ramifications of his textual choices warrants a deeper exploration in relation to his choral and vocal output. Tellingly, of the three Bang on a Can composers, Lang has written the most choral music, perhaps because of his interest in text. Yet he has also refrained from identifying himself strongly with writing choral music. When asked specifically about this in another interview, Lang replied, "I never wanted to be a choral composer and I feel like I'm a text composer…I feel that all choral music I have written is that way—it is something that is text-based" (Van Niekerk 2014, 81). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to make a full survey of Lang's choral works,[28] it is useful to briefly consider how categorizing Lang's choral output in terms of text source as well as performance aesthetic can contextualize the musical style and performative features of *crowd out* within his oeuvre.

When considering Lang's choral and vocal-ensemble output based on text, three interesting sub-groups emerge: multi-movement oratorio-like works, such as *the little match girl passion* (2007; version for chorus and soloists 2008), *battle hymns* (2009)*, the national anthems* (2014b), and *teach your children* (2019), employing a heterogeneous array of texts in libretti assembled by the composer*;* smaller-scale works drawing on a range of secular and sacred texts but with notable attention to

[28] A fairly comprehensive overview of Lang's choral works up to 2014 can be found in Van Niekerk (2014). My overview here is based on my own analysis of Lang's oeuvre, and the analytical categories I mention inevitably leave out some important and frequently performed works including *statement to the court* (2010) and *love fail (2012/2016)*. All of Lang's choral works can be found at https://davidlangmusic.com/music/chorus-vocal

Jewish religious scripture and thought;[29] and choral and vocal works such as *crowd out* based on crowd-sourced texts drawn from internet searches. Here, I briefly treat the last of these categories.

As mentioned earlier, Lang created the libretto for *crowd out* by querying internet search results to complete the phrase: "When I am in a crowd, I…" In the preface to the score, Lang describes how he eliminated those results that were either too specific or offensive, and arranged his choice of the rest into a composite text. "My interest was to make a text that would seem in some way universal," he writes, "a list of feelings we might all be capable of having as individuals within any kind of crowd, wherever and with whomever we might find it" (Lang 2014a, "notes" 1). By using a search algorithm to source text, Lang intended to bolster the libretto's potential to resonate with all persons by being drawn from "all persons" as symbolized by the internet. Prior to *crowd out,* Lang had used this working method in sourcing text for *the whisper opera* (2013), an hour-long work for soprano and small ensemble, as well as for *reason to believe* (2011) for Trio Mediæval. Crowd-sourcing text from internet searches and auto-complete algorithms has since become a staple of Lang's compositional toolbox, as Lang has used this method to generate the raw textual material for several other pieces including *simple song #3* (2015), *manifesto* (2015), *when I am alone (2015), the public domain* (2016), and *teach your children* (2019).

the public domain in particular deserves specific mention as another work by Lang for one thousand voices, commissioned by the Lincoln Center in New York City as a sequel to *crowd out* and premiered on August 13, 2016 in the outdoor public square at the Lincoln Center as part of the

[29] Although it has little bearing on contextualizing *crowd* out, Lang has drawn on Jewish scripture and the writings of Jewish thinkers for the texts of fully one third of his smaller choral works, perhaps because of his own Jewish heritage. Works such as *stateless* (2019), *a girl* (2017), *if I sing* (2017), *make peace* (2016), *just* (2014), *evening morning day* (2007), and *I lie* (2001) either feature text directly drawn from the Hebrew Bible or texts in Yiddish or English by rabbis or Jewish religious thinkers. Most recently, the choral song cycle *the writings* (2019) is a compilation that Lang assembled from four previous works and one newly composed movement: *again (after Ecclesiastes)* (2005), *for love is strong* (2008), *where you go* (2015), *solitary* (2016), and *if I am silent* (2019). Drawing respectively on the books of Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, and Esther, Lang writes that these texts chart the course of the year within the Jewish faith, based on their associations with different holidays throughout the year.

center's Mostly Mozart Festival. Notably, *the public domain* actually premiered one year before *crowd out* had its American premiere in Chicago in 2017. Lang characterizes *the public domain* as a more upbeat sequel to his earlier work. While the text had been compiled in a similar way—this time from search results related to the phrase "one thing we all have in common is…"— *the public domain* deliberately featured a greater proportion of singing as opposed to speaking, and a more optimistic social message of coming together as opposed to isolation. While the relationship of *the public domain* to social practice composition could certainly merit its own analysis as well, space and focus here preclude a more detailed discussion of the work.

Finally, both *crowd out* and *the public domain* form part of a growing subset of Lang's works that center on community engagement as a performance aesthetic, often through large-scale public spectacle. *crowd out* occupies an important place in Lang's oeuvre in this regard as his first completed piece to engage with this working method. In speaking to me about his community-engaged compositional work, Lang explicitly framed his approach to this work as the creation of both a social and musical challenge to be solved collectively by participants:

> I was sort of aware that I would be putting this weird problem in the middle of a community to be solved, and part of the thing that was really interesting to me is the solution of the problem in the community of just how to make it happen, how to organize how to get groups together, who do you invite, what's the attitude, right. How is the whole ecosystem constructed?... I think if you make a problem that takes some ingenuity to be solved, that most of the ways that people solve it will be interesting, and most of the ways that people solve it will represent their community—how they solved it where they are. (Lang 2020)

In other interviews, Lang has also repeatedly connected the value of community-building through musical participation to ideas of universalism and utopia, similar to his rationale for using internet searches to source text (Chicago Humanities Festival 2017, Freymann 2019). Lang also reiterated this idea when speaking to me:

> What I started realizing after I worked on *crowd out* was that there are not many places in our society where ordinary people have that experience [of working

> together on a collective challenge] … We are asked more and more to fragment ourselves and to separate ourselves from each other, and to try to keep us from imagining how we may work together to build something beautiful. And so music I think may be one of the purest places where this kind of utopian experience can happen. (Lang 2020)

If there is one commonality that Lang seems to draw across all his community-engaged works, it is that the vision of togetherness dramatized on stage by participants collaboratively solving a musical problem is meant to be interpreted as an expression of humanistic utopia.

In addition to *crowd out, the public domain,* and *teach your children,* Lang has addressed community engagement through two other major choral projects and two instrumental works. In *memorial ground* (2017)*,* commissioned by the East Neuk Festival in Scotland and 14-18 NOW: World War I Centenary Art Commissions, Lang created a short hymn tune fragment which was made freely available to community choirs across Scotland. Participating choirs each created a unique version of the piece by adding their own solos and text on top of the fragment, reflecting their own thoughts in commemoration of the battle of the Somme during the First World War. In *the mile-long opera* (2018), thirty-eight choirs from all five boroughs of New York City collaborated on a single performance spread out across the entire length of New York City's Highline Park, an elevated park on Manhattan's West Side built on the reclaimed route of a former railway. Lang collaborated with poet Anne Carson and essayist Claudia Rankine on assembling a libretto based on oral history interviews with New York residents, all of whom shared their stories about the meaning of seven p.m., the start time of the performance.[30] In *symphony of broken instruments* (2017), Lang wrote an instrumental piece specifically to be played by all the instruments in the Philadelphia public school system in need of major repair. The performance culminated in raising enough money that the instruments could be repaired, rendering the piece itself un-performable in the future. Finally, in *harmony and understanding*

[30] Donald Nally, once again, was the music director of *the mile long opera*, although each movement was taken on by a group of several choirs under the direction of other conductors.

(2018), Lang composed a work for audience and orchestra in which the first half of the "performance" consisted of teaching the audience a melody by rote that they then sang along with the orchestra.

It is my contention here, and throughout this chapter, that Lang's musical and social concerns in these community-engaged musical projects amount to a clear realization of the aims of social practice art-making within the genre of new Western classical art music. In his two quoted statements and the pieces described above, Lang reveals a concern with designing musical materials that necessitate people coming together in specific ways in order to realize the music, which Lang conceives as a specific puzzle or problem to be solved. It is this commitment to composing human relations into the musical substance of the score in order to make a social commentary through performance that forms a crucial part of my definition of social practice composition throughout this dissertation.

When I asked Lang directly about social orientations to musical art-making, he chose to reflect on other participatory visual and performance art works he was aware of:

> It seemed like the whole artwork was having the idea and talking the funders into it, and raising the money, and going to the permitting people, and talking to local community people to get it to happen, and organizing the volunteers. So there's this whole ecosystem of all the things that have to be created in order to make this event. And that became the event, you know. You think of art as being the object, but actually it's the whole sphere around the object, it's what you do to make the object, and what's left when the object is gone. (Lang 2020)

While he did not explicitly connect these works to inspiring his own compositional practice, Lang clearly remains aware of developments toward social practice in the broader art world.

As a future study, a broader examination of the growth of Lang's engagement with ideas of social practice across many of his works would certainly be warranted; my own focus for the remainder of this chapter remains squarely on the organization and analysis of *crowd out* in Chicago. I

contend that studying the Chicago performance of *crowd out,* both analytically and ethnographically, reveals much about the possibilities of social practice as a music-compositional practice, as well as the origins, concerns, and realization of social practice in Lang's own compositional thinking. Specifically, I argue that the vision of community articulated by the composer and organizers of the Chicago performance of *crowd out* is best understood through the lens of social capital theory. In the next section, through an oral history account of the gestation the Chicago performance, I explore how a model of community as a network of individuals, drawn from social capital thought, was made public by the creative team behind the American premiere of *crowd out.*

crowd out Chicago—Network Building Through Musical Performance

David Lang presents a consistent origin story for *crowd out* each time he discusses it. He describes attending a soccer match at the Arsenal football club's Highbury Stadium in London during the 1990s and being overwhelmed by the way an arena-sized crowd could nonetheless chant and sing in unison (Lang 2014c). Lang had long wished to recreate this sonic experience, and finally found a sympathetic commissioner in Stephen Newbould, then-artistic director of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, who was the first to say he would take a chance on commissioning such an unorthodox work.[31] *crowd out* was eventually jointly commissioned by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, the Berlin Philharmonic, and the Spitalfields Music Festival, with assistance from the Arts Council England, the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group Sound Investment Fund, and Spitalfields New Music Commission Fund. Each organization in turn had the opportunity to premiere the piece in June 2014; on June 8 in the atrium of Millennium Point office complex in Birmingham, on June 14 and 15 in the piazza of the Kulturforum in Berlin, and on June

[31] Lang has been vague about when this first interaction took place. It appears to have been during 2008, around the time of his Pulitzer Prize win for *the little match girl passion,* either at the Pulitzer Prize event or during a dinner at Lang's house.

21 at the Arnold Circus in Shoreditch as part of the Spitalfields Festival (Rheingold Publishing 2014). All performances were conducted by Simon Halsey, then-principal conductor of the Berlin Radio Choir, the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and education director for the Berlin Philharmonic.[32] For each performance, a separate choir of one thousand singers was assembled, mainly from pre-existing local choral organizations. It would take three more years for *crowd out* to come to the United States.[33]

The Chicago performance was first the brainchild of Tim Munro, a Chicago-based flautist known for his work in the Western classical new music ensemble *eighth blackbird* as well as his public advocacy for new music entrepreneurship. In 2015, Munro had recently left *eighth blackbird* and was in the process of exploring alternative concert aesthetics that more closely integrated performers and audience. Speaking about several previous concerts he had organized, Munro told me, "[I had] started to really re-shake around my own thinking about how to present concerts…ones that had a lower barrier to entry for performers. So it wasn't just that the performers were the technicians and the audience was the recipient" (Munro 2019). Munro latched onto the idea of performing *crowd out* because of Lang's similar commitment to questioning the performer-audience divide and encouraging participation through the piece, made explicit in his preface to the score:

> Performers and audience should be indistinguishable from each other. I don't want the audience (should there be one) to feel separated from the performers, in location, dress, ethnicity, ability, etc; rather, the performers and audience should be mixed together, in all ways, so that non-performers might feel that they share the communal space with the performers. It may even be possible and even desirable to encourage audience members to join in at certain moments. (Lang 2014, "notes" 2)

[32] Halsey left his position with the Berlin Radio Choir in 2015, but retains his role in Birmingham, and also serves as conductor of the London Symphony Chorus and director of choral studies at University of Birmingham.
[33] *crowd out* has since been performed in Los Angeles as well, in June 2019 as part of Fluxus festival at Walt Disney Concert Hall.

Munro asked conductor Donald Nally to come on board the project in early 2015 (Munro 2017). Nally, artistic director of the Philadelphia-based professional choir The Crossing and director of choral activities at the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, is well-known for his work premiering contemporary choral music, and in particular has fostered a longstanding artistic relationship with David Lang through performing and premiering many of his works. Nally related to me in a phone interview how he was particularly drawn to Lang's focus on the societal role of the individual in the work—how despite the work's massive forces, Lang deliberately built the music out of the independent yet coordinated actions of one thousand individual participants. As Nally enthused in recalling the performance: "we're really reminded [often] of how our whole lives are constructed around maintaining our individuality while collaborating with seven billion other human beings. And so pieces that work to remind us of that are really—I hate to use the word magical—but they're magical in some ways I think" (Nally 2019).

Both Munro and Nally emphasized how at first their goal was simply to bring *crowd out* to life in the United States; they were mostly struck by the musical possibilities of the piece. Yet as they started to explore partnerships that could make recruiting such a large number of singers possible, the goal of the performance began to shift towards specific social ends, particularly in terms of increasing participation and representation of different demographics of the city. Both the Chicago Humanities Festival and Illinois Humanities, two separate non-profit organizations, ultimately came on board to make the performance possible: Chicago Humanities Festival as executive producer of the event, and Illinois Humanities to coordinate on-the-ground efforts to recruit and rehearse with participants. As Alison Cuddy, artistic director of the Chicago Humanities Festival, related to me, part of her organization's role in the process was to promote maximum opportunities for musical participation from citizens from across the city:

> It's interesting how everyone has different networks, right, and how those all came together…Part of why [Munro and Nally] were approaching organizations like ours and Illinois Humanities was because they were trying to get outside of their own network and not have it be a bunch of trained voices…to really have as many people who would just want to participate in this for the fun of it or it was something they could do with their community. (Cuddy 2019)

The piece also held a distinct appeal for Cuddy as part of the festival's theme for 2017, which was "Belief." As Cuddy noted, "[Belief] was this whole thinking of what it means to be part of something bigger than yourself, and people's individual belief in the potential or the limits of a crowd or a group or a collective" (Cuddy 2019). Lang, too, spoke to the importance of belief, or "faith," in organizing *crowd out* in a talk following the Chicago performance:

> The reason why I've started doing more of these community projects is because I think this act of faith that's necessary for all of the people who participated in this piece—you had to imagine for yourself that coming together would give you something powerful before you were capable of receiving that power…So there's something incredibly noble and pure about the transaction and to me that's why [music] becomes the perfect place to build these kinds of communities. (Chicago Humanities Festival 2017)

The idea to recruit the thousand-voice choir out of participants representing all fifty of Chicago's electoral wards was first proposed by Paul Durica, then Director of Programs and Exhibitions at Illinois Humanities, Illinois' state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.[34] This was something that had not been done in earlier performances, and indeed there was no explicit need to do so; the European premieres had all been organized through the participation of large and mid-sized pre-existing community choirs, and Lang had never indicated how so many voices were to be found and assembled. Yet Durica felt strongly that this was the way to make the Chicago performance viable, for reasons related both to the missions of the organizations involved as well as the timing of the project. For example, part of the mission statement of Illinois Humanities explicitly states its aim to "[strengthen] the arts by nurturing open

[34] Durica is now Director of Exhibitions at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

and curious audiences, promoting dialogue about art, combating exclusivity, creating new spaces (physical and otherwise) for art, and brokering relationships across communities" (Illinois Humanities 2021). By involving participants representing a cross-section of demographics from throughout Chicago and taking the making of the performance to them through neighborhood-based rehearsals, Durica envisioned being able to address all elements of this mission through the rehearsal process. Additionally, 2017 was set to be Chicago's Year of Public Art, a celebration of public art installation and performance in neighborhoods across the city. While *crowd out* was not officially part of the city's programming for the celebration, framing the performance in this way strongly correlated with then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel's[35] goal to "galvanize Chicago artists to realize a public art project [bringing] sculptures, murals, mosaics, site-specific performances, and community-engaged work to all 50 wards" in order to "[highlight] the creativity, connectivity, and character of each neighborhood" (City of Chicago 2017).

Speaking about his own perceptions of the goals for the project, Durica told me:

> I also saw it as an opportunity for our organization [Illinois Humanities] to create new relationships and build new ties across the city. I don't need to tell you that Chicago is a very large city geographically, but it is also a very divided city, and a very segregated city and also a place where different wards have access to different resources and opportunities. And so, I thought this is a great chance to just go out into the city and learn more about it and use this experience as an opportunity to do that. The idea was that in the process of planning and executing this performance, we would be learning about various arts organizations, different spaces and venues, and we'd be able to host events with other partner organizations that would be interesting to work with, and we would be able to build relationships moving forward using *crowd out* as a starting point. And beyond that too, we could find points of resonance across the city. (Durica 2019)

Durica, along with principal project coordinator Bindu Poorori and principal assistant conductor AJ Keller[36], devised a process for reaching out and connecting with local arts

[35] Rahm Emanuel was mayor of Chicago from 2011-2019.
[36] Keller was then a doctoral student, now lecturer, in choral conducting at Northwestern University.

organizations across the city through rehearsal-gatherings in each ward of the city, structured around learning the piece. Beginning in June of 2017 and continuing all throughout the summer, each rehearsal-gathering for *crowd out* would feature both an introduction to and rehearsal of the music, as well as a conversation about that ward's artistic and cultural resources and needs. In each ward, Keller and Poorori coordinated with a local organizer who became the group leader or "conductor" of each ward-based choir, while during rehearsals Keller helped with musical teaching and leadership and Poorori and other Illinois Humanities staff to helped facilitate the conversation portion. Although the organizers sought to have an anchor choir or organization to form the basis of membership in each ward's singing group, individual participants were also invited and welcomed regardless of musical experience. As Poorori described, the process of building this network of participants resembled grassroots organizing:

> *crowd out* Chicago was an opportunity to develop relationships and have conversations about the state of the arts in our neighborhoods. We didn't just want to engage with music groups, we wanted to engage with other community organizations…We [contacted] choirs, art groups, after-school and church groups across the city. There were days when all we did was walk around a neighborhood, put up flyers, talk to the alderman and knock on church doors. (Munro 2018)

Munro also decided to involve himself in the day-to-day recruiting efforts. Recalling his own involvement throughout the summer, Munro similarly connected the importance of the community organizing process to his own recognition of the potential of the project:

> We were cycling around to every point in the city. And I think it was getting to know parts of the city that I'd never been to… [and] understanding the social dynamics of the city better [that] made me realize that of course this is the thing that we should be doing. Because if that's what this project can do for many organizations and many people, is to see different parts of the city work as musicians with people from other parts of the city, it's like of course this is such a no-brainer. (Munro 2019)

In order to participate in the final performance, participants were requested to attend one or two ward-level gatherings, as well as one of four regional dress rehearsals held throughout

September where the choirs from multiple wards were combined. Illinois Humanities staff attempted to keep attendance records to ensure ideal participation, although this was not rigorously followed through on. Admittedly, the organizers were not entirely sure, in the end, if they attracted participants from every ward; estimates given to me ranged from between forty to forty-five wards that participated. Regardless, organizers did appear to reach their target of at least one thousand participants. On the day of the performance, participants gathered all together for the first time at 1:30 pm in the Bowl, a stadium in Millennium Park adjacent to the Bean, for a partial run-through of transitions between sections of the piece led by Nally, Munro, and Keller. They then made their way over to the Bean for the final 3 p.m. performance.

As we have seen throughout the project history described above, each member of the *crowd out* Chicago creative team differently yet consistently reiterated the importance of network-building to the realization of the project—a critical conceptual connection to the social capital model of community. While each of them approached this rationale through different keywords, invariably the language they used throughout their discussions with me pointed back to one fundamental idea: that they were creating community through animating existing networks and creating new networks between individuals and organizations throughout the city through opportunities for musical participation. Many of these anticipated opportunities were envisioned by the project leaders in terms analogous to Putnam's understanding of "bridging social capital." Organizing the performance both necessitated and provided for opportunities to create social links beyond one's individual or organizational sphere of influence. Each member of the creative team believed that not only was this process of network building necessary in order for the project to be viable—in terms of gathering enough participant voices as well as public support—but that it was also inherently beneficial for participants and organizers alike to engage in this networking process.

For Munro, this was most clearly articulated in his own desire to create greater reciprocity between audience and performers—an aim which Lang himself connected to the creation of a "communal" space—as well as his gradual realization about the civic value of building these connections. Crucially, it was through actually witnessing the network coming together, in part from his own efforts, that Munro recognized the value of musical participation for those who would take part in it. For Nally, the piece's celebration of the role of the individual within the process of "collaboration" held the greatest resonance; this comment echoes the focus of social capital theory on the individual as the building block of social networks. For Cuddy, the recognition of Munro and Nally's desire to expand their own networks and her own organization's role within that process convinced her of the project's merits. She believed in the added value of involving non-professional musical participants, as this would increase the performance's relevance for a greater number of citizens. Finally, Durica and Poorori perhaps most clearly defined the location of social capital within the project. By building lasting relationships between individuals and organizations as they coordinated each ward-level singing group, they clearly sought to create a network that could be harnessed by their own organization for future benefits.

Whether consciously or not, several comments the creative team made to me also belied a more general understanding of community as a potential space for the acquisition of capital, broadly conceived. Lang's reference to the "transaction" between composer and participant in a community-engaged musical work reveals a particular attitude toward the social space created within a performance of the piece. In Lang's view, participation in the work has to offer the participant some perceived tangible benefit in order for the composer to expect people to want to participate. In his conversations about *crowd out* and his other community-engaged work, Lang suggests that at least one of these benefits is the experience of a utopian ideal of community made possible through participatory performances that create a sense of participating in something larger than oneself.

Similarly, Lang and Cuddy shared a conviction about the "power" of people coming together en masse through music, implying that greater participation affords the potential for greater social opportunity for each individual, an assertion also echoed by Bithell in her comments on social capital in a choral context. Finally, Illinois Humanities organizational concerns with "brokering relationships," as well as their staff members' overall interest in "representing" the diverse demographics of Chicago on stage, evince strong links to concepts of capital acquisition. By aspiring to build a crowd that would allow participants to see themselves reflected in the demographics of the piece, the Illinois Humanities organizers believed they could increase their own efficacy at building relationships, thus increasing the size and strength of the social network their organization and partners had mutual access to. In his concerns for the "different resources and opportunities" present in each ward, Durica in particular also clearly saw his own organization as a beneficial "external asset" that could foster the growth and health of these resources through developing lasting connections at the ward level.

Whether through the terms of "relationship building," "representation," "collaboration," or "networking," the recollections of the *crowd out* creative team all pointed toward a conception of community-building as the creation of social capital. It was this coming together—this animating of existing civic networks and assembling of a new network through the making of the piece—that the creative team ultimately understood as the meaning of community in their performance. Donald Nally perhaps most succinctly encapsulated this understanding when he told me: "It feels like you're in an ever-growing community as you go through the process of the piece assembling" (Nally 2019).

crowd out: Analysis and Aesthetics of Social Practice

Nally's comment opens up the possibility of analyzing the score of *crowd out* in relation to the social meanings attributed to the piece by the Chicago creative team. What is it about the music of

crowd out that makes an assertion like Nally's possible? How do we recognize a specific ideal of community through the artistic materials of a musical performance? In this next section, I explore how Lang's compositional choices in *crowd out* set out the musical preconditions that made possible a public understanding of community as social capital within the Chicago performance. Through a close examination of the text, staging, sound, and structure of the piece, I contend that Lang implicitly takes up the concerns of the social capital thesis as outlined by Putnam through his compositional choices in *crowd out*. Specifically, I argue that Lang structurally, visually, and aurally encodes the concepts of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital into the piece in various musical and performative ways, while dramatizing Putnam's central fear about the atrophying of social bonds in contemporary American society.

In making this argument, I follow the thesis of social practice in maintaining that meaning in a musical artwork does not lie solely within a composer's intent, but rather in how their intent is rendered legible and understood in and through performance. It must be noted that Lang has never publicly expressed familiarity with Putnam's work or acknowledged any influence of social capital theory on his own thinking about *crowd out*. Yet if we admit that one of the purposes of a social practice composition is to dramatize a social issue through the configuration of human relations in performance, then it follows that an analysis of how that issue is performed—visually, aurally, socially—becomes a crucial analytical concern in understanding compositional social practice in action. As a piece of music specifically concerned with creating "a sense of community" within the crowd, *crowd out* therefore also represents a site of embodied theorizing about the meaning of community itself, through the medium of musical performance. Social capital references one cultural understanding of the meaning of community that composer, organizers, and participants alike had the potential to recognize in sound and activate in performance. The fact that the Chicago performance of *crowd out* was indeed understood in this way by many of its organizers, as we saw

above, necessitates a deeper look into the features of the piece that allowed this particular understanding to emerge.

Score and Layout

A brief overview of the layout and musical characteristics of Lang's score for *crowd out* is warranted first. The score contains little conventional music notation and is best understood as a literal script describing how the work is to be performed. Three pages of preface and two pages of the complete libretto precede the beginning of the score proper. In the preface, Lang explains his inspiration for the work, describes how each of the thousand participants is to be organized into separate groups, and offers other helpful hints for following his text-based score. Within the score itself, Lang divides the libretto into eight separate musical sections, which he calls "parts," each occupying one or two pages of descriptive instructions sequentially labeled part 1, part 2, part 3 etc. The instructions for each part begin with several adjectives characterizing the expressive or emotional quality of that section of the piece. This is followed by a numbered list describing what section text from the libretto participants will use during that part, the order in which different groups of participants within the crowd should enter in performing the text, and the quality of their vocalism (see Figure 4.1). Much of the piece is simply spoken or shouted; in parts 3 and 6 only, Lang provides musical notation for short melodic fragments that participants sing in their own time, forming a pan-tonal sound-mass of overlapping canons (see Figure 4.2). In each instruction, Lang also indicates whom participants should follow for musical leadership. In some parts, individual participants are allowed to speak or sing in their own time and tempo; in others, they are instructed to follow the central conductor's indication of specific spoken rhythms or dynamics, or to echo back phrases or rhythms provided by their own group's individual conductor. At all times, the central conductor remains in control of the temporal flow of the piece: i.e., when each itemized instruction

part 1 – I draw deep breaths – OCEANIC, UNSTABLE, BECOMING MORE INTENSE. It should feel as if the performance is emerging from the general buzz of the audience. This opening may take a very long time.

1. ALL 4 STRANDS: each person independently, speak in a whisper at first and gradually move to normal voice, at a normal pace, repeating sentences in order, with varying lengths of silence between each sentence.

I draw deep breaths

I feel more confident and calm

I lost it all

I do not waste my words

I hate for all eyes to be on me

I start to panic

I feel so alone I could cry

I start to sweat

I can fully submerge myself

I don't want people to know

I push, I shove, I glare, I mutter

2. EACH STRAND SEPARATELY: after several minutes conductor signals separate strands for crescendi and decrescendi; first BLUE, then BLUE and GREEN, then BLUE, GREEN and ORANGE. After several minutes:

3. ALL 4 STRANDS: conductor signals all strands for crescendi and decrescendo, in unison

4. ALL 4 STRANDS: conductor signals to accent the "I" in each sentence, while speaking the rest of each sentences in normal voice, at a normal pace, repeating as above

Figure 4.1 David Lang, *crowd out* (2014). Score, pg 1, part 1 of the piece.

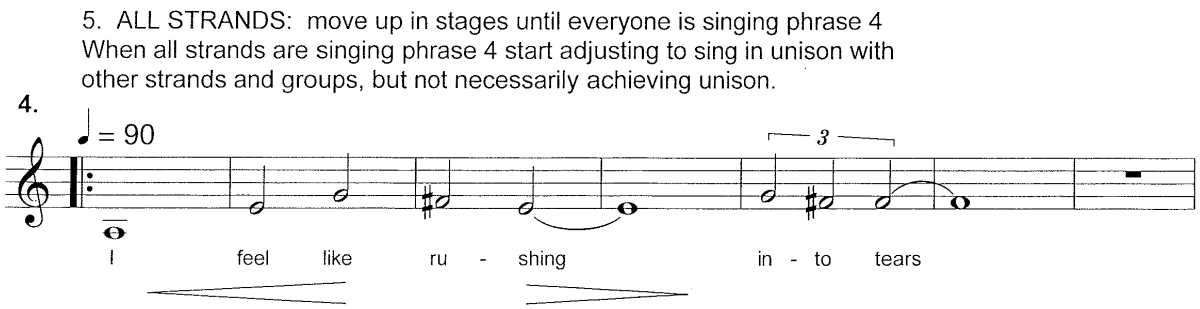


Figure 4.2 David Lang, *crowd out* (2014). Score, pg 3, example of canonic melodic material used in part 3. Copyright © 2014 by Universal Music Corp. Administered by Casa Ricordi Srl. *All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured.* Reproduced by kind permission of Hal Leonard Europe Srl *obo* Casa Ricordi Srl.

and each new part is to commence. It is left up to the central conductor to decide how best to communicate this information.

Text

> I am interested in the kind of crowd created on the internet, how millions of individuals are now free to share endless information about themselves with others around the globe, never more connected in time and text, and yet paradoxically never more emotionally separated. (Lang 2014a, preface)

In much the same way that Putnam considers the individual and individual experience as the building blocks of a social capital network, the experience of "I" becomes the focus of *crowd out.* As mentioned earlier, Lang sources the text for his libretto from results for an internet search completing the phrase "When I am in a crowd, I…" Not only does Lang exclusively gather "I" sentiments in his preliminary web search, but the word "I" frames the beginning of each individual line in the libretto. As illustrated in the opening vignette, and Figure 4.1, Lang draws attention to this at the end of the first part when he instructs all participants to begin accenting the word "I" louder than the rest of the text, such that the overall sound is overwhelmed by a mass of overlapping "I's," each fighting for recognition amidst the throng. This moment neatly encapsulates a central tenet of the piece—the sense of loneliness experienced amidst a crowd.

As Lang mentions in his preface, the libretto is intended as his own commentary on social life on the internet—how the largest network ever created by humans simultaneously leaves many feeling disconnected, unheard, and alone as people spend more time online and less time in the physical company of other human beings. The paradox of *crowd out* is palpable in performance; the visual spectacle of a thousand-strong crowd shouting and singing about loneliness dramatizes the tenuousness of inter-personal connection in contemporary Western culture that increasingly unfolds exclusively online. Even in their togetherness, participants in *crowd out* are compelled to speak about their separation, and indeed most of them inevitably cannot know each other due to the size of the performance forces. Despite the scale of its performance forces, the work remains, in fact, an intimate exploration of individual experiences of isolation. This individual loneliness remains a prominent theme throughout the libretto. A full nine lines out of the total forty, nearly a quarter of all lines of text in the work, feature the word "alone." Additionally, another twenty-two lines of the libretto convey negative emotions, such as panic and loss.

Putnam, too, voiced similar concerns about the relationship between media consumption and the atrophy of social bonds. One of the most striking and controversial conclusions of *Bowling Alone* was that the growth of television use was measurably responsible for the decline in civic engagement by American citizens over the second half of the twentieth century (Putnam 2000, 283). One must obviously be careful about generalizing about the effects of one media technology (television) to another (the internet) that is addressed in *crowd out;* indeed, Putnam and later scholars equivocate on the positive or negative effects of the internet on social capital growth (Putnam 2000, 148-180; Julien 2014). Yet the belief that the growth of media technology in private life is at least partly responsible for a growing social disconnect in middle-class Western society remains a powerful cultural narrative, a narrative that *crowd out* shares in common with the impetus (if not all the research) of the social capital thesis. By focusing his libretto on the sense of disconnect

engendered by online sociability, Lang participates in and perpetuates the construction of a cultural narrative, clearly explicated by the social capital thesis, that social bonds in contemporary Western society are atrophying, and that one way to salvage them is through making participatory art that requires in-person cooperation.

Social Organization

> The individual is the basic unit of organization of my piece. ln *crowd out* individuals experience three different kinds of crowds - a crowd of about 25 to 50 people, with whom that individual is most closely connected; a larger crowd of about 250 people; and the largest crowd, of 1000 or more, made up of all the participants. (Lang 2014a, preface)

Lang is interested in the experience of the individual not only in the text but also in the social organization of *crowd out*. In this statement from the preface, Lang reveals his concern for the quality of the participatory experience—for *how* each individual participant will experience their relationship to others with whom they perform the piece. Lang's interest in orchestrating relationships through musical means, both in body and in time, underscores his commitment to the tenets of social practice. In charting these levels of inter-personal association that each individual experiences within the work, I argue that the different ways that Lang requires participants to relate to each other can be understood as analogous to the concepts of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.

As seen in his quote above, and displayed graphically in Figure 4.3, Lang assigns each participant to several layers of organizational hierarchy in the piece. Individual participants are first placed into what Lang calls "groups" of 25-50 people, each led by their own conductor or leader.

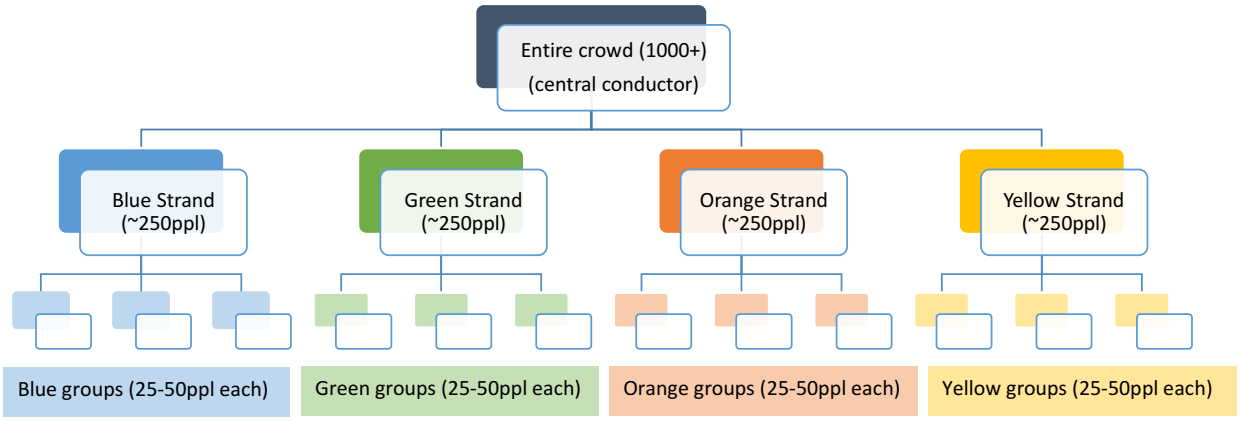


Figure 4.3 Hierarchical social organization of participants in *crowd out*.

Lang explicitly connects this organizational principle to the feeling of community by limiting the size of each group to 25-50 people; "any more than that and I would worry that the localized, individual-in-a-community-of-individuals feeling among each group would be harmed," he writes (Lang 2014a, "notes" 2). This feeling within each group could be likened to Putnam's "bonding" social capital. In the Chicago performance, these were the groups that came together at the ward level to rehearse the piece. Many of them were anchored by pre-existing choral organizations or school or community groups, and even those participants who were not drawn from these associations would have had the chance to meet and get to know each other before the performance. Each group was also meant to represent their neighborhood and their ward, and thus to represent a sense of place-based identity and solidarity in performance. While Lang does not specifically reference bonding social capital in its academic context, the feeling and function of inter-personal association that he imagines within individual groups is strikingly analogous.

Individual groups are further assigned by color into what Lang calls "strands." There are four strands in *crowd out* of approximately 250 people each, designated by the colors Blue, Green,

Orange and Yellow.[37] In the Chicago performance, each strand responded to signs of their color that were held up by one of the central assisting conductors, and different strands begin different numbered events in the score at different times. Invariably, events are begun first by the Blue strand, followed by the Green, Orange, and Yellow strands respectively, producing a continually cascading or dove-tailing musical effect as the piece segues from part to part.[38]

Participants' experience of the strand level of *crowd out* readily corresponds to "bridging" social capital. Each strand is made up of associations between groups that may not self-identify as similar, but who share a self-interest in co-performing their directions in the piece successfully. In fact, each group cannot fulfill its musical function within the piece without forming networks of association beyond their individual groups at the strand level. In Chicago, the strands were also meant to represent community-building on a larger scale. By bringing together different wards with different demographics, each strand was intended to perform a sense of sharing and celebration of cross-cultural communication, of a city getting to know itself through the process of performing connection across its physical and cultural breadth. In *crowd out,* strands bridge the differences between groups through a common goal, enacting the "power" of coming together that both Lang and Cuddy addressed in their rationales for the piece. The network created at the strand level affords participants the experience of that power that is not possible within their own bonded group alone.

Finally, the communication between leaders at different hierarchical levels within the piece is analogous to the idea of "linking" social capital. First, group members communicate most proximally with their individual group conductor. Part of each group conductor's role is to translate information from the score and the central conductors—information which may be expressed in music-specific jargon—into terms that their group can understand, regardless of their level of

[37] Lang writes in his preface that he chose these colors to correspond with Jackson Pollock's painting Blue Poles.
[38] Lang writes that this order for the strand entries was determined following the alphabetical order of the strand colors (B, G, O, Y), an entirely arbitrary decision that can be altered by the central conductor.

musical training. Adding to the aptness of the analogy, many of these individuals in real life inevitably assume these leadership roles in the piece because of their pre-existing roles within their community or organization, or connections to other organizers of the performance; it is their own social positionality that affords them this role in the social dynamics of the piece. By controlling the direction of information flow between groups, group conductors, and the central conductors, Lang clearly delineates how participants are able to express themselves, respond to others, and move through the piece's organizational hierarchy.

It must be emphasized that Lang himself does not theoretically employ the terms of social capital himself. Yet his dramatization of societal roles and behaviors in the work reproduces certain characteristics of social networks that have been the purview of social capital theory. Similarly, the labels of bonding, bridging, and linking are descriptions of forms of human social association that precede their theoretical formulation; the terms allow the observer to reveal and analyze the structure of the social network. By reproducing these forms of association in sound and on stage, Lang responds to one implicit understanding about the structure and purpose of community in Western society.

Vocal Production and Timbre

> *crowd out* is designed so that most of its participants need have no musical training or ability; in fact, I would prefer that the piece be made mostly of ordinary community members. Performers do not have to be able to read music, they should speak and shout in everyday, non theatrical (sic) voices, and they should sing in everyday, non operatic (sic) voices. (Lang 2014a, "notes" 2)

Here, Lang clearly articulates the politics of participation that *crowd out* is meant to embrace in performance. By endeavoring to organize the performance space so as to eliminate barriers to active participation in music making, Lang reveals his intentions to create a sense of communality amongst all who take part in the piece, removing the need for a distinction between performer and

audience. Lang also explicitly connects the importance of participation to the sonic aesthetics of the work, envisioning a sonic commons within the work in which vocal timbre is not policed as either "professional" or "untrained." By making a piece that is mostly spoken and shouted, Lang encodes accessibility of the means of vocal timbral production into the aesthetics of the piece. The ability to sing "well" or "on pitch," fears which continue to cause barriers to participation in traditional Western choral ensembles, is in fact immaterial to one's ability to participate in *crowd out*. The relationship of accessibility of musical participation to the social capital thesis recalls Bithell's statement about the social benefits of musical inclusivity, encountered earlier. By creating a musical work in which full participation in sound is presumed regardless of musical aptitude, Lang explicitly endorses the idea that greater participation brings greater reward for all, connecting again to the idea of the "power" of coming together.

Texture and Form

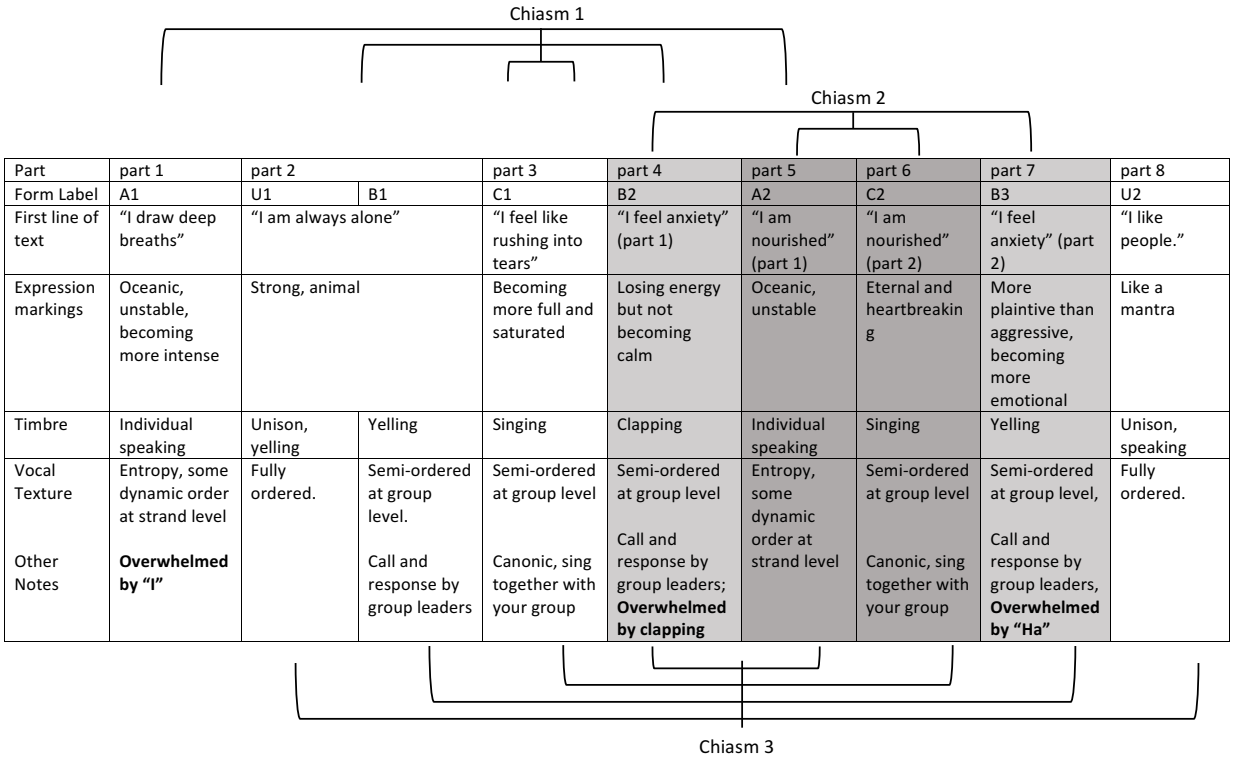
Finally, Lang foregrounds the connective possibilities of social capital in the formal structure of *crowd out* through the way he uses degrees of individual autonomy or collective organization to create different musical textures that delineate the form of the work. Specifically, individual performers are at different times given varying amounts of leeway to shout, speak, sing, or rhythmically clap sections of text in their own time—which I analytically define here as "entropy"—or, by contrast, in greater coordination with members of the other strands or the entire crowd—which I define as "order." These differences in entropy versus order are specifically used by Lang to delineate the form of the piece. Here, I contend that analysis of the form of the work reveals a very specific formal design that not only alludes to previous choral compositional practice but also makes an argument for a teleological progression toward musical order. I argue that the social narrative

dramatized by this progression attempts to produce a musical resolution to the tension between individual and collective purpose that forms the central social drama of the piece.

We have already seen how Lang uses text and expression markings to characterize each "part" or section of *crowd out* (see Figure 4.1). Yet these musical elements cannot necessarily be heard as formal elements without audible musical change. The most common way that Lang audibly delineates the form of the work is through changes in vocal texture. Four distinct vocal textures can be found in the work, characterized by different degrees of entropy or order: allowing each individual to speak a section of text at their own pace (maximum entropy), call and response between group leaders and their group members (semi-ordered), singing melodies in canon (semi-ordered), and unison choral speaking or yelling by the entire crowd (maximum order). The form of the work is primarily made audible through this gradual evolution of texture as each part of the piece dovetails into the next.

Charting the trajectory of entropy and order within the work elucidates its overall formal structure (see Figure 4.4). The form of *crowd out* can be understood as a series of overlapping chiastic (arch-shaped) relationships between the parts of the work, whereby the properties of musical texture of different sections mirror each other on either side of a central axis. In written form, chiasms are most simply expressed as ABB'A', or in a more expanded form as ABCB'A'. As a formal device within choral music specifically, chiasms are particularly associated with religious symbolism of the cross, especially in the sacred vocal music of Johann Sebastian Bach (Hamer 2000).[39] While in Lang's work these chiastic structures are not religiously symbolic, they still comprise a formal artistic structure signifying the potential of musical meaning to emerge in performance.

[39] Bach uses chiastic formal structure particularly in passions and cantatas to create both symbolic and formal relationships between the meaning of different movements, something Lang was likely aware of through his own work on his own passion setting, the *little match girl passion* (2017).



Part	part 1	part 2		part 3	part 4	part 5	part 6	part 7	part 8
Form Label	A1	U1	B1	C1	B2	A2	C2	B3	U2
First line of text	"I draw deep breaths"	"I am always alone"		"I feel like rushing into tears"	"I feel anxiety" (part 1)	"I am nourished" (part 1)	"I am nourished" (part 2)	"I feel anxiety" (part 2)	"I like people."
Expression markings	Oceanic, unstable, becoming more intense	Strong, animal		Becoming more full and saturated	Losing energy but not becoming calm	Oceanic, unstable	Eternal and heartbreaking	More plaintive than aggressive, becoming more emotional	Like a mantra
Timbre	Individual speaking	Unison, yelling	Yelling	Singing	Clapping	Individual speaking	Singing	Yelling	Unison, speaking
Vocal Texture	Entropy, some dynamic order at strand level	Fully ordered.	Semi-ordered at group level.	Semi-ordered at group level	Semi-ordered at group level	Entropy, some dynamic order at strand level	Semi-ordered at group level	Semi-ordered at group level,	Fully ordered.
Other Notes	**Overwhelmed by "I"**		Call and response by group leaders	Canonic, sing together with your group	Call and response by group leaders; **Overwhelmed by clapping**		Canonic, sing together with your group	Call and response by group leaders, **Overwhelmed by "Ha"**	

Figure 4.4 Diagram of *crowd out's* musical form, showing chiastic relationships between parts.

Figure 4.4 shows the changes in texture in the work alongside changes in text and expressive markings. In the second row of the chart, each part of the piece is given its own formal label, representing relationships between vocal textures across different parts (A1, A2 etc); sections labelled "U" refer to moments of the entire crowd speaking in unison. The chart reveals two readily apparent chiastic relationships between parts of the work, while a third chiasm requires slightly more explanation.

The first chiasm spans parts 1 through 5, roughly the first two-thirds of the piece. Parts 1 and 5, both "oceanic" and "unstable" in expression, consist of sections of the libretto spoken individually by each participant at their own rate, with some directions for crescendos and decrescendos provided by the central conductor. Parts 2 and 4 are predominated by call-and-response textures, whereby each group leader directs their group to repeat after them, either by

yelling back or clapping back a shouted phrase in rhythm. (A brief section at the start of part 2 of unison speaking, involving all participants, will become formally important as well, as discussed below.) The center of this chiasm, part 3, features canonic singing of a melodic phrase. Overall, the chiasm is of the form ABCB'A'. Each section is distinguished by a new text, but pairs of sections are audibly linked by shared vocal texture. The second chiasm, between parts 4-7, is by contrast readily apparent through shared text, as parts 4 and 7 share a text, as do parts 5 and 6, creating a chiasm of the form ABB'A'. Yet Lang here clearly distinguishes these formal divisions through similar textures as well. In particular, the second chiasm is characterized by the "overwhelming" actions of the outer parts, where participants are called upon to gradually drown out the instructions of their group conductors and the text of the libretto by responding with handclaps or the word "ha" in rapid succession and increasing unruliness.

The third formal chiasm in the work becomes clear by dividing Part 2 into two subsections based on texture—unison yelling first (U1), followed by call and response yelling (B1). Spanning nearly the full duration of the work from part 2 through part 8, this chiasm begins and ends with all participants speaking or yelling together in unison (first half of part 2 and part 8) and progresses inward through call and response yelling (second half of part 2, part 7) and canonic singing (part 3 and part 6) to meet a central pair of parts (part 4 and 5). These inner two parts, admittedly, do not mirror each other in terms of text or texture, yet together they form the centre of the piece and share an expressive quality of instability. Ironically, or perhaps on purpose, one important phrase of text at this central moment of the piece is "I am obsessed with being at the center of attention." In this final chiastic relationship, part 1 can be considered as an introduction, with the overall trajectory of parts 2-8 a teleological movement away from and back towards order—the moments when all participants in the work express a single sentiment together in unison.

Experiencing each of these chiasms temporally as the piece progresses creates a particular musical narrative which, I argue, attempts to resolve the central tension between individual versus collective expression in the work. At first, participants seem unable to coalesce for more than a brief moment around a common sentiment; in part 2, participants briefly express "I am always alone" all together before entropy begins to reassert itself. The first chiasm thus dramatizes the atrophying of connections that is one of the central concerns of social capital theory. The second chiasm then dramatizes a sense of rising up—a need for collective action that asserts itself as the sum of individual actions, overwhelming the control of each individual group leader. In this chiasm, the social network within the piece is harnessed for a common purpose but does yet represent common sentiment. The final formal relation experienced by participants in the work is the knowledge that they can coalesce to express a common sentiment, dramatized by speaking the same words together in unison. Musically, this final moment resolves the tension created by the more numerous moments of overlapping and entropic vocal expression into a readily understood expression of order, revealing the overall musical narrative of the piece as a teleological drive away from and back towards order.

Yet even in this final formal relation, what unites participants is their expression of disconnection. The final moments of the libretto again present a picture of loss: "I lost it all…I feel left out…I lose control," participants say. Even while the musical drama of the work seems to resolve into an expression of community as unity, the text remains at odds. That the moments of common expression in the piece consist of text that that is the most disconnected in the work is not lost on the listener. As Lang mentioned in his preface, his central goal was to dramatize both what we gain and lose by coming together. A sense of commonality does not necessarily accord with a sense of self-realization, and this is dramatized by the discord between the musical narrative and the textual narrative of the piece. Participants experience a musical narrative of attempting to coalesce in

common purpose, while at the same time being unable to express a similar sentiment in text. The tension between these two layers of the work recalls Lang's preface to the score, where he writes that we are "never more connected in time and text, and yet paradoxically never more emotionally separated" (Lang 2014a, "notes" 1). In the worldview of *crowd out,* that which unites us also divides us.

Conclusion: A Strange Utopia

Through the correspondence between its social message and musical execution, *crowd out* presents a clear example of compositional social practice—of dramatizing a social issue (the breakdown and attempted recovery of social connection in contemporary Western society) through musical-performative means. Participants in *crowd out* do, in the end, find common purpose, although it is only through recognizing what divides them, not what unites them. Yet if Lang intended these moments of common purpose as a symbolic form of "utopia," as he suggests in public commentary about his community-engaged works, it is a strange utopia indeed. Many of those involved in the performance—participants, organizers, and even Lang himself—clearly wanted the performance to be an expression of unity, even while recognizing the difficult subject matter of the piece. Nevertheless, some of the features of the work, perhaps inadvertently, kept those participants whom the Chicago organizers hoped to connect with from being able to feel fully welcomed into the community-building goals of the performance.

One of the concerns highlighted by the organizers was the difficulty of building community through co-creating a "work" of musical art—an individual, reproducible musical object that is in some way shaped by the vision of an originating artist. The difficulty is that in making certain artistic elements of the performance fixed—such as text, sound, structure, or style—some participants may not resonate with or may even feel actively excluded by aspects of the work's message or musical

aesthetic. Both Munro and Poorori recognized this as they began teaching the piece in ward-level rehearsals over the summer of 2017. As Munro recalled:

> I think one of the struggles in [crowd out] is how much of it is set in stone…I felt a little straightjacketed by the piece and by the text of the piece as we started to find—oh, actually, this is not actually relevant to your experience as a performer. One of the things that we really wanted was that it would feel relevant to peoples' experience, and I'm discovering now that this isn't one hundred percent relevant to your experience so why are we even doing the piece. (Munro 2019)

Poorori concurred:

> A group would say, 'There are things in this piece that make me feel uncomfortable,' and I felt on the defensive. I wish I'd said, 'Here's this controversial piece, that doesn't speak to everybody. Now that you're here, what does it evoke in you.' (Munro 2017)

It was, admittedly, difficult to track down performers from a widely dispersed, one-time event to corroborate Munro and Poorori's sentiments, but eventually I gathered eleven respondents to an anonymous online survey. While this may represent only a small sample of possible personal meanings of performing the piece, survey respondents' answers highlighted many of the possibilities and concerns inherent in the piece that have already been raised in this chapter. Several wrote about the same concern as Munro and Poorori above. As one expressed, "It was a very nontraditional piece and not my favorite musically." Another said, "After the first rehearsal, I thought about quitting because the piece seemed so random." A third added, "If I have one criticism, it's that the piece was not as egalitarian as it was intended…it was difficult for us to become deeply involved in the piece because we did not know how it was supposed to sound." All three of these comments highlight how a challenging musical aesthetic can act as a gatekeeper for participation, welcoming those who understand the music and see themselves, their culture, or their class reflected in it, and excluding those who do not.

Tellingly, survey respondents also echoed aspects of social capital acquisition, particularly bonding and bridging, within their conception of community in the piece. Several commented on

the importance of participating in the piece because their whole choir had decided to join. As one wrote, "we were the representative choral group from the first ward, and I really feel like an important part of my a cappella group. They're my friends." Another wrote that it was important "to represent my choral group to the rest of the city (and beyond)." Clearly, participating in the piece within a group that felt like "mine" was at least one possible personal experience of bonding within the piece, an experience that we have seen was supported and encouraged by Lang's choices about how to socially organize the piece. Several participants also recognized the importance of building connections across the city within the performance, a sentiment akin to bridging. One wrote that "I feel that my participation led to an appreciation of being part of a larger Chicago community." A second specifically connected bridging to the idea of participatory art, writing that they joined in order "to be able to say I took part in art-making, in live performance with people from every corner of the city." A third brought up diversity as an element of bridging, writing, "The diversity of the singers (both age-wise and racial/ethnic/gender) was the most important element in building community."

Still, these moments of social capital creation identified by participants were not always executed intentionally by the Chicago organizers. With regards to the last statement above, no statistics were kept by the organizers about how diverse their final thousand-strong crowd actually was, and at least some people of color who participated felt that they were among the few who took part (Munro 2017). Other participants wrote about how the organization of the performance could have encouraged more participation and communication. As one survey respondent wrote, "I liked seeing all the other community groups at the performance, but we didn't get to meet any of them, really." Another concurred: "I only wish there had been more rehearsals—more opportunities to share this text with other people—to co-create with them, to be heard and seen and revealed and expressed and celebrated alongside my neighbors."

These comments, while brief, highlight the ways in which musical and organizational decisions in creating, producing, and performing a social practice composition actively impact participants' understanding of the community they experience as part of the work. Those participants who took the time to correspond with me understood that they had taken part in a community-building exercise and were readily able to interpret their experience of that community in relation to musical and social aspects of the piece and their performance. In addition, the language that they used implicitly underscored that the strengthening of social capital was a strong motivator for their participation, and perhaps even a shared understanding of the meaning of community-building in the piece. Participants wanted to join in the piece with their home choir and represent their ward to others. They wanted the chance to connect with others across the city and celebrate its diversity. Similarly, they were disconcerted by moments in the rehearsal process, the music, and the text that made them feel isolated from others, or that they were not equipped to understand the music and its style.

These brief reflections, prompted by participants' responses to me, are in no way meant to diminish what *crowd out* accomplishes in performance. Exemplifying the tenets of what I have defined as social practice composition, Lang sought to reproduce in sound and on-stage a concerning social phenomenon—the atrophying of social connections in contemporary Western society—and in bringing together a mass of people to voice that concern in turn do something about it. That the process of organizing the piece in Chicago also demonstrated the difficulty of rebuilding those social connections only serves to highlight the depth of the issue further. Lang's own statements about creating musical utopias aside, the arts at best can point toward possible future realities, but often also end up reflecting the one that creators and participants currently find themselves in. As social practice continues to grow within Western art music composition, the successes and challenges of *crowd out* in Chicago point towards the need for a deeper consideration

of how musical aesthetics can either encourage or preclude engagement by different demographics and stakeholders—an engagement that is a precondition for creating the networks of social capital that participatory performances such as *crowd out* will continue to aspire to.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A PRACTICE OF SOCIAL PRACTICE COMPOSITION

I think the way forward lies, not in commissioning more new works that depend on the status quo, but in reimagining what it is the chorus does, or can do, and shaping new works accordingly.
—Paul Hillier, "The Nature of Chorus" (2012, 76).

I began this dissertation with the intent to investigate how an ideal of "community," central to the institution of Western classical choral music, influenced the creation of three recent, large-scale, civic choral performance projects in the United States. Starting from the premise that the concept of community is best defined "in action" (Shelemay 2011, 364)—by the meanings that people ascribe to the term, and the social relations they form and re-form in service of those meanings—I opened Chapter One by relating how notions of community-building historically formed the foundation of amateur choral organizations devoted to European oratorio performance (Butt 2001; Ahlquist 2006a; Applegate 2013; Minor 2013) and choral music education in the United States (Smither 2000; Campbell and Higgins 2015), and how choral professionals and participants today strive to further this goal of community in new ways as the demographics of and issues facing urban communities shift and change (Bithell 2014; Boerger 2018; de Quadros 2019). I positioned each of the case studies that followed as examples of a broader movement in choral music and the arts in general to examine how these historical foundations pose challenges to contemporary issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and sustainability (Graves 2005; Borwick 2012; Finkelpearl 2013), attending specifically to how composers, performers, and organizers of choral music in the United States have responded to these issues by engaging communities across divides of class and culture in creating and performing new choral artworks.

Situating my research within contemporary ethnomusicology, I identified "performance" (Madrid 2009; Buchanan 2016) as the principal theoretical lens for my own analysis. In the chapters

that followed, I studied premiere performances of three choral musical works by Reena Esmail, Julia Wolfe, and David Lang primarily as social performances of social meaning—most importantly, as meanings of community. In each case, I argued that composers', conductors', creators', and participants' understandings of what "community" could mean in relation to "choir" both informed and were in-turn shaped by creating and/or performing these new works together. I documented the gestation of these performances through the recollections of creative personnel and participants, written and audio-visual records of their work together, and my own fieldwork as a participant-observer and performer, demonstrating how musical collaborators on these projects encoded and enacted three specific meanings of community through musical performance, including: community as a site of personal and social healing (for Reena Esmail and her collaborators on *Take What You Need*; Chapter Two); community as a locus of "authentic" intercultural exchange (for Julia Wolfe and her collaborators on *Anthracite Fields*; Chapter Three); and community as a form of social capital (for David Lang, and for the co-organizers of the Chicago performance of *crowd out;* Chapter Four). Finally, I explored how certain audiences, constituents, and stakeholders in each of these musical projects received and understood these intended meanings of community.

Taken together, I contend that these studies point towards ways that professionals and amateurs in the field of Western classical choral music in the United States today put ideas about community *to use*. These studies illustrate composers, conductors, singers, and supporters of choral music actively thinking about the implications of their discipline's claim to community, and their own responsibilities to that claim as they worked together to create new choral artworks. The artistic traces of this thinking—present in the decisions of composers as they crafted a score, conductors as they rehearsed or analyzed the music, singers as they related personally to sound, story, and movement, and administrators and funders as they considered the broader social aims of their work—demonstrate how these many collaborators intentionally enacted specific ideals of

community through their many decisions about sound and performance throughout creating these works. To the extent that these case studies primarily document the creation and performance of new choral compositions, I offer that they exemplify an emerging and intentional artistic development amongst certain composers and creators of contemporary Western classical choral art music to *compose* community in sound and on stage.

Recognizing the intentionality of this claim to community-building in these case study works returns me to the idea—introduced in Chapter One and reiterated throughout each subsequent chapter—that these works also exemplify an emerging compositional orientation that I term *social practice composition*. To recapitulate my definition from Chapter One: "social practice composition signifies how musical co-creators consciously choose to present musical participation in the creation and performance of a musical artwork, and how participation fundamentally alters the presentation of musical art." In naming these works as examples of social practice composition in the choral arts, I attended analytically to how community—as both the material-social relationships between people involved in these works, and the ways they communicated or understood mutual belonging through their participation—was created *compositionally*—through composers', other artists', organizers', and participants' artistic decisions about sound and performance throughout their work together. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, social practice is a well-established concept in the fields of art criticism and performance studies that speaks to how artists employ social experience and relationship-building as both the form and content of an artwork (Jackson 2011; Atkins 2013; Courage 2017).

Throughout these case studies, I argued that the co-creators of each musical work/performance enacted specific configurations of social relations in sound and on stage that communicated specific intended meanings of community. Examining these case studies collectively,

I contend that they exemplify a singular and unique development in both aesthetics and practice within the fields of contemporary composition and choral music. In each of these performances, the relationships between people formed, strengthened, and mediated by musical creation and performance were a principal focus—indeed the central point—of their work together. Relationship-building was encoded in the sound and structure of these musical scores, in the rationale given by organizers and funders for these premieres, and in the ways that participants talked about their own understanding of how the music related to ideals of community. Finally, and most importantly, artists and participants in fact *performed* specific material and social relationships between communities in the process of realizing these works, leading them to recognize and understand the meaning of community in their work through the act of musical performance. Thus, specific meanings of community in these works were not simply latent in their status as musical art objects, but were, rather, *emergent* in performance.

To be sure, Esmail, Wolfe, Lang, and their collaborators and co-organizers were all at different stages in the intentionality of their own thinking about compositional relationship-building. Each of these studies thus offered opportunities to highlight examples of practice, while illuminating other areas for re-thinking strategies of community engagement in music-compositional work. Yet, taken together, these works demonstrate a growing consciousness amongst composers and choral musicians about how to engage communities in creating new choral artworks, and the composer's and creator's responsibility to how musical-artistic decisions call communities into relation—or even into being—in performance. I contend that these works thus illustrate a "social turn" (Bishop 2006) in Western classical music composition that is analogous to the social turn in the visual and performing arts. I choose to denote this musical-compositional development with my own term: *social practice composition*.

In drawing a parallel between a more established field of social practice arts and the types of artistic social engagement that the creators of these musical works attempted, I did not intend here to prove a new aesthetic category of music composition. Indeed, in asserting a musical-aesthetic affinity between these works, I am conscious that this analytical category is of my own making. To be clear: at no point during my research did the creators of these performances acknowledge a deliberate influence of the social practice arts on their work, or indeed consider themselves to be mutually working within the same socially-engaged compositional paradigm. Yet, in choosing to name what I observe as a shared aspect of creative practice both between these musical works and an established artistic field, I contend that the type of socio-musical work that took place throughout these case studies is useful to *think with*. Recognizing this moves me, at the close of this dissertation, toward issues of practice: how composers, conductors, and choral participants engage with each other and other communities through the creation of new works; how this practice comes to define a musical aesthetic; what issues arise in working across communities; and how this compositional practice might grow and move forward.

I do not propose to offer here a firm set of best practices or a comprehensive critique of these works. Rather, I draw on examples from these case studies to highlight categories and questions for creators to consider as they continue to engage communities in the creation of new choral artworks. In the following sections, I return to three threads or themes raised separately and at various points in these case studies, but that merit being brought together here to close: social practice as a musical aesthetic; social practice as a creative process; and social practice as a part of professional practice. Each section ends with some key questions that I contend professionals should ask about future compositional projects aligned with the tenets of social practice. I close with a reflection on choir, composition, and community broadly conceived, and what this study has offered my own practice as a conductor and composer and can continue to offer others in my field.

As a choral practitioner using ethnomusicological methodology to study my own field, my essential question throughout this conclusion is: what now?

Social Practice as a Musical Aesthetic—Relations as Form

One of my central arguments throughout each of these case studies has been that the relations formed between artists, musical participants, and the communities with whom they worked were an indivisible part of the musical materials of these works. By this, I mean that composers, other creators, and participants understood social relations and the particular configuration of those relations in sound and performance as an integral and intentional artistic component of the content of these works *as musical artworks*. Recognizing this moves us toward considering relationship-building as both an aesthetic choice and an aspect of musical material in Western classical art music that emerges out of a composer's intention to create community through musical performance.

In Chapter One, I outlined a brief lineage of social relations as a part of artistic form in the field of social practice arts broadly conceived, beginning with public art projects that considered the public "as object" to be artistically shaped by the artist in consultation with the public, to relational and participatory projects that involve the public "as subject" of the artwork, to dialogic and socially-engaged arts that involve participants as "co-producers" of artistic material (Courage 2017, 48). Scholars engaged in critical work on social practice often view this trajectory as a progression toward a more politically defensible aesthetic position as the participant gains greater autonomy and agency within the realm of artistic production (Matarasso 2019). I have notably chosen not to pursue such a critical approach in this current research. Still, I find that examining the types of relationships that Esmail, Wolfe, Lang, and their collaborators envisioned creating through the performance of these musical works alongside existing taxonomies of form in social practice arts provides us with tools to theorize the possibilities of relationship-building as part of a composer's aesthetic. Such an

analysis allows us to ask: how was community created *in and as music* in these works? Is this the community that the musical creators *intended* to create?

Of the three works considered here, *Take What You Need* bears the strongest allegiance to a social practice aesthetic of artistic co-production outlined above and in Chapter One. In each performance, the piece implicates all people in the room as participants, as they literally engage in musical dialogue through call-and-response. In a performance setting, selected community members are also given the opportunity to narrate their own stories, while in workshop settings this interlude time is often instead unstructured and given over to participants to voice whatever they see fit. Still, Esmail did not fully co-create all aspects of her piece with her participant-collaborators in Skid Row; Esmail wrote the libretto and music as a single author and "set" these on the community, while organizers expressed that the Urban Voices Project singers themselves may not feel that they have the ability to realize the piece on their own without professional musicians to provide the underlying musical scaffolding of the work. Through the musical and performance parameters of *Take What You Need,* Esmail thus establishes the pre-conditions for a specific configuration of relations between professional and amateur musicians representing different socio-economic classes to emerge in the act of musical performance, as they mutually create a shared platform for musical dialogue. This particular formal configuration of relations enacts both the extent and the limits of the community for whom the work exists.

As noted at the start of Chapter Three, Wolfe's intentions in *Anthracite Fields* were the least recognizably aligned with the aims of social practice of these three case studies. Wolfe's aim from the outset was to compose a concert choral work about, rather than collaboratively with, the mining community of Pennsylvania and its descendants. Still, the intent of the commissioners, exemplified by funding documents jointly prepared by Wolfe and the Mendelssohn Club, began from a desire to interrogate choral and compositional practice in the process of engaging a community in telling their

stories. Several elements of the project as whole—notably Wolfe's own interviews with miners, field trips for choristers to meet miners and learn about mining history, and the story circle sessions for descendants of mining families—were necessarily acts of relationship-building in service of this broader aim. Perhaps most importantly, Wolfe's own choices about how to present the mining community in text and sound were received by Mendelssohn Club participants as being about relationship building in their own performance; in their responses to me, singers emphasized how specific elements of the music enabled a sense of empathy and connection between themselves and the mining community, to the point of creating an imagined shared community in and through performance around the subject of mining and its impact on America. While the public components of Wolfe's process to create the libretto and music remained more consultative, rather than participatory or co-creative, *Anthracite Fields* exemplifies how a musical aesthetic of relationship-building may necessarily emerge out of a compositional process of community engagement. As the earliest of the three case studies considered here, *Anthracite Fields* is instructive as an example of a developing practice and aesthetic.

Lang's aesthetic of relationship-building within *crowd out* could best be described as participatory, in both the most literal and limiting senses of the term. Through the score of *crowd out,* Lang scripts the conditions for certain time-delimited relationships between masses of people to be formed and dissipate in acts of performance, and for these performative relationships to be transferrable to other communities irrespective of the specificities of place as the piece moves from one performance location to another. The subject of *crowd out* is thus participation itself, broadly and generally conceived. One aspect that made the Chicago premiere most interesting was the ways in which its own organizers inched the production toward a more co-productive process of social practice, embedded within the specific place and issues of their own city. By engaging in dialogue with community members as part of the rehearsal process, they aimed to connect cultural resources

across the city. By drawing in participants from each and every electoral ward, they attempted to use artistic production as a means of encouraging diverse access to civic cultural events. Yet the production also highlighted the difficulties of a goal of broad artistic participation, as some participants felt that the text did not express their own lived experience, while organizers commented on the difficulties of encouraging participation across lines of race and class. *crowd out,* then, demonstrates how participation, encoded as a musical-aesthetic ideal, can be both empowering—in that the structure of the piece enabled organizers to pursue their own broader goals of connection across the city—and at odds with the realities of participation on the ground.

I pose the questions below, and similarly throughout the sections that follow, as questions derived from my analysis of these case studies that might be asked by composers, conductors, other musicians, and organizers about future social practice compositions. My aim is for such a body of questions to facilitate critical reflection by musicians trained in Western classical art music on their own community-engaged compositional and performance work, in order to encourage conscious, deliberate, and responsible growth of this practice.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- How are different communities called to engage with one another, physically or imaginarily, by the performance parameters of the musical work?
- What role does "the community" take on as participants in the form of the musical work? Are community members conceived as consultants, participants, co-creators, or in some other capacity?
- How are different communities situated specifically in place and space—or not—in the act of performing the work?

Social Practice as a Creative Process—The Politics of Participation

While I focused in the previous section on participation and relationality as part of the form and compositional intent of a musical artwork, I turn my attention here to participation as creative process, asking: what actually happens on the ground in the process of enabling people to participate in a musical work? For creators of Western art music, embracing an aesthetics of participation and engagement entails a concomitant responsibility to be aware of how participants—especially those whose stories are being told on stage—experience agency in the process of creating a performing a work. In each of these case studies, different groups of people were invited or allowed to provide creative input, participate musically, and express their own voices in different ways and to different degrees. Indeed, one could argue that the nature of these pieces as fixed works requires certain limitations of personal creative agency; in order for a musical artwork to retain an individual identity as a work*,* some elements of it must be fixed. Important questions thus become: who gets to make decisions about how participation occurs within the musical work? On whose terms are creative partnerships initiated, coordinated, and sustained? Who gets to tell whose story? Such questions move us towards a consideration of the ethics of compositional practice.

Composers and conductors—myself included—are rarely trained in critical analysis of the ethics of their work. Thus, this area of creative process might represent the greatest obstacle to developing a self-aware social practice amongst creators of new art music. While it is outside the bounds of this dissertation to offer a detailed critique of the ethics of each of these projects, I return here to three key aspects of the process of engendering musical participation that emerged from these case studies, aspects that offer some preliminary traction on an ethics of social practice composition: the terms of community engagement; the terms of musical production; and the terms of musical presentation.

Terms of Community Engagement: Projects and Residencies

Artists doing community-engaged work, especially alongside community members perceived or self-identifying as socially or economically marginalized, need to be mindful of the terms of their commitment to that community. In particular, as many interlocutors in my research noted to me, the artist has the privilege of being able to leave the community at the conclusion of their work, while the community and any issues that may have been addressed through the artistic project remain. It is thus important for the artist and community together to establish clear terms at the outset of a project for how and how long they are mutually obligated to each other in the process of creation and production of a musical performance. The artist should also be aware of how and why they are engaging in such a partnership in the first place. Are they responding to a call or need within the community itself, or their own pre-conceived interest about what might be a worthwhile project?

As Atkins notes, social practice art projects tend to fall along a spectrum from short-term performative or participatory works to longer-term community residencies (Atkins 2013). I suggest that it is helpful to view these case studies through a similar lens in order to examine the terms of obligation that composers and organizations established with the communities with whom they worked. Such a framework also encourages us to ask about the possibilities for the musical work to remain a part of the ongoing life of these communities as well.

As we saw in Chapter Two, *Take What You Need* developed out of Esmail's specific residency period with the Urban Voices Project, a partnership she entered into based on her own existing relationships with organizations in Skid Row. Esmail's mutual relationship with the community continues today largely through her voluntary regular visits and ongoing performances of her music by Skid Row-based organizations. The piece continues to have a role and life in this community because the creation process allowed participants to experience a degree of ownership over the work (although perhaps not as much as in their collaborative songwriting projects), and because of the

space that it makes for participants to continue to voice and re-voice their experiences in each subsequent performance. As an example of a musical work arising out of a community residency, *Take What You Need* illustrates the lengths and types of commitments that composers and organizations must undertake in sustaining long-term relations in social practice projects.

Wolfe's engagement with the Pennsylvania coal mining community in creating *Anthracite Fields* was more circumscribed, consisting of several site visits and introductions made to local community members by theatre artist Laurie McCants. Wolfe's own interest in the community as a subject for her work was stoked by hers and Alan Harler's own personal heritage and connections, rather than a call from the community itself; nonetheless, they did find willing collaborators amongst certain community members. The Mendelssohn Club organization also took steps to outline the terms of their obligations to the mining community through organizing ancillary story circle events in both Philadelphia and Scranton and ensuring that families with connection to mining history were in attendance at performances. Still, subsequent performances of the piece around the United States were largely done without the participation of the mining community. The community that the piece has continued to have the most ongoing life in is the Mendelssohn Club choir community, through what the piece meant to choir members' own sense of their contributions to developing choral practice. The longevity of this relationship is reflected in how Wolfe and the piece's commissioners implemented community engagement throughout the project, as the mining community was solicited initially for their input (but then their involvement largely concluded) while the choristers were actually called to engage on a more substantive level with the questions of choral practice at the heart of the project. The community experienced at the heart of *Anthracite Fields* in performance, then, is as much (if not more) about the choral community as it is about the mining community.

In *crowd out*, David Lang constructed a mobile and universalizing concept of community that has traveled to many different locations. Thus, the composer himself has largely had little contact

with or obligation to the specific communities where the piece has been performed. In reference to Atkins' framework above, the piece is conceived as a participatory event, rather than a community-engaged co-creation. Yet this was not necessarily the case for the organizers of the Chicago performance, who spoke to me about how the relationships formed between organizations throughout the city over the course of the project have continued to have a lasting impact. Although the duration of the relationship for creating the piece was short, performing the piece thus served as a catalyst for organizational relationships that have served as the basis for future collaborations. *crowd out* thus illustrates how differing ideals of engagement can exist within a single project, and the need for creators to define their concept of engagement and their responsibility to that concept.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- On whose terms are the aims and engagement process of the musical-artistic project initiated?
- What timelines are involved for artists and participants? Are artists and community members committing to a single participatory performance, a time-delimited artistic project, or a long-term engagement?
- What role is the resulting work meant to, and able to, play in the life of the community long-term?

Terms of Musical Production: Aesthetic Gatekeeping and Authorship

Each of these case studies also exemplified how musical participants are or are not able to recognize themselves within the sound of a musical work and feel welcomed into its performance. Here, I refer to this aspect of these works as *aesthetic gatekeeping:* who do these works *sound like*, and how does that impact how community members feel included or excluded as a result. Such a question implicitly touches on issues of identity construction in musical composition and

performance. While I did not consider identity systematically in this research, participants' personal and social identities are thus necessarily implicated in the socio-musical work of social practice composition. Considering how a compositional aesthetic may act as a gatekeeper to participation gives us another lens on the politics of participation in social practice compositions, as composers' choices about whom to represent and how to represent them (or let them represent themselves) in sound form the basis for the community that actually comes into being in performance.

In the performance and workshop of *Take What You Need* that I observed, for example, audience members and other participants from the Skid Row community were effusive in their applause and affirmation to any and all storytellers throughout the interludes, likely because they were able to see something of themselves in that storyteller on stage. Yet, as we have also seen, the musical materials of the piece precluded participants being able to identify with it in some ways, due both to factors of vocal range as well as genre; as a piece of classical music, *Take What You Need* was outside the bounds of Skid Row community singers' musical vernacular. Recognizing this signals the extent of their participation and welcome, and their placement within the broader cross-cultural community that the piece attempts to animate in performance. In *Anthracite Fields,* the sound of the piece, as New York post-minimalism, also signified the community that it was properly written for—a cosmopolitan community of choral musicians and classical music appreciators, rather than necessarily the mining community itself. At the same time, Wolfe's avoidance of overt folk source material did help avoid an essentialist depiction of mining culture in the piece, making room for the piece to be built upon the actual process of engagement with the mining community that Wolfe and the Mendelssohn Club undertook. Lang's work possibly offers the most challenging portrayal of aesthetic gatekeeping of these three studies. In deliberately setting out to provide a "universal" experience of community, the ways in which his piece was unable to speak for some who

participated—whether due to specific negative emotions in the libretto, or Lang's avant-garde musical aesthetic—were cast in stark relief, revealing the limits of his participatory ideal.

Each of these works also raised questions about musical authorship. As I noted early in Chapter One and briefly touched on in each case study, these pieces circulate as single-authored "works" within the professional Western classical choral community; the composers of these works are publicly acknowledged, and feted, as their sole creators. Indeed, most if not all decisions about sound in these works, and thus the sense of community and welcome they provide, were made by the composers alone. In each of these case studies, I have in response attempted to open up the idea of the "musical work" to encompass the actual social activity—the social performance—of many different stakeholders that went into creating these premieres as performances. Recognizing the musical-art-object as a performance provides us with the analytical grounds to examine the extent of "the work" required by many different stakeholders to create and realize "a work:" who made which decisions, and how, and why, and how these decisions affect with whom and for whom the work is about and created. As composition moves to embrace an aesthetics and a politics of participation, understanding how the public acknowledges (or does not acknowledge) various creators and participants for their co-authorship of the work thus becomes a necessary ethical consideration.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- How do musical aesthetics signal openness, welcome, and the extent of community identity within a musical work?
- How are the responsibilities for different creative decisions within a participatory project determined and assigned?
- How is the authorship of musical material acknowledged?

Terms of Musical Presentation: Framing Community in Performance

Here, I place these works in dialogue again with principles of applied ethnomusicology—a field comprising ethnomusicologically-informed research and service conducted in the public sphere in direct collaboration with and for the tangible benefit of community members. In Chapter Two, I noted how one of the aims of applied ethnomusicological work is to provide new "frames for musical performance" (Hemetek 2006), reconceptualizing the boundaries of who can perform, where they can perform, what they can perform, and for whom they can perform in the service of redressing social issues within a community. Each of these case studies demonstrated how the creators of these works framed the concept of community generally (as healing, as authenticity, as social capital) as well as specific communities (the homeless, the working class, the general civic body) through analogous decisions about the frames of musical performance. In the act of participating, community participants in a social practice composition by necessity take on aspects of self-presentation as they exhibit and express their senses of self-identity for an audience or for each other. These acts of self-presentation constitute a performance frame. Recognizing the dual nature of social practice compositional work as both participatory and presentational (Turino 2008), I contend here that social practice composition calls both the artist and researcher to be critically attentive to how community participants are actually presented, and are allowed to self-present, on stage. While in the previous section I attended to sound, here I ask about bodies: *who* is actually present on stage, and what does that reveal about how community and participation were conceived in the musical work?

It is helpful to briefly review how such decisions played out in each case study. In *Take What You Need,* Esmail allowed participants to self-present through the stories they shared in the instrumental interludes, and the affirmative offerings to other participants through call-and-response. Unlike in Urban Voices Project's collaborative songwriting work, however, Esmail did not

attempt to frame the work as about the homeless experience or about their creative input into the musical text, but rather as the overall experience of mutual relationship across divisions of class. The piece thus frames members of the homeless community *in relation to* members of a more affluent community of performers and audience.

In *Anthracite Fields*, Wolfe actively framed the mining community as a past community, recalled and reconstructed through her process of composing a sonic archive of signifiers of mining life. Instead, singers in the Mendelssohn Club choir were musically framed as the historical mining community itself and called to take on that role through a process of empathetic identification. Wolfe's framing of the mining community as an artifact of the past in fact keyed this process of empathy, as singers were not put in the position of representing a contemporary community of mining descendants who were, noticeably, absent from the performance stage itself.

In *crowd out,* Lang deliberately framed the community he imagined in the work as "everybody," through his choice of a libretto culled from internet searches and his deliberate performance requirement for one thousand voices. Performers are thus precluded from expressing their own individual lived experience in a performance of the piece; no one in *crowd out* is truly allowed to self-present, as they are called to collectively express a shared experience that has been authored by another voice. Whether this choice on Lang's part is meant to be performatively illustrative of the tension at the heart of the work of the individual being lost in the collective remains an open question.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- How is community identity framed by musical performance?
- How are community participants given agency (or not) over their self-presentation in the musical work?

Social Practice as Professional Practice—Skills and Responsibilities

As a final thread to consider, each of these case studies illustrated moments where collaborators on these works were working outside of the responsibilities and training of the Western classical composer or choral musician as conventionally conceived. In many different ways, creators and organizers deliberately initiated these works as experiments in choral practice, expanding the boundaries of what a "choral work" could be. Below, I review three professional skills and responsibilities, highlighted both by these case study works as well as by my own process of researching them, that represent some aspects of how composers' and creators' exploration of social practice contributed to expanding definitions of Western classical choral musical practice. Here, in turn, I consider facilitation, socio-musical analysis, and advocacy.

Facilitation

Each of these case studies, in different ways, illustrated the growing relevance of facilitation as part of the professional skill set of the contemporary musician, especially for those working in community-engaged settings. Facilitation, as first introduced in Chapter Two, has already been extensively theorized as an integral part of the discipline of Community Music, and represents a fundamental re-orientation of the role of the musical leader (composer, conductor, organizer) away from the responsibilities of a score and toward responsibility to the participant and the participant's own voice (Higgins and Willingham 2017). Here, I suggest that musicians working in more performance-oriented contexts, such as the creation of social practice compositions, are also beginning to realize the importance of facilitation to their work.

Take What You Need offers the clearest examples of the implications of facilitation for composers, conductors, and organizers working on creating choral artworks in community. Esmail organizes the performance of the work itself around the central person of the facilitator, who

becomes a catalyst for musical participation by leading the music in call-and-response as well as welcoming community speakers into the interludes. Esmail clearly based her facilitator role on the weekly practices of the Urban Voices Project, which are primarily based around facilitation. While Wolfe and Lang did not explicitly incorporate the role of facilitator into the musical structure of their works, acts of facilitation featured prominently throughout the process of creating and performing *Anthracite Fields* in Philadelphia and *crowd out* in Chicago. Wolfe's own interviews with mining community members, as well as the story circles that the Mendelssohn Club organized, were clear examples of the necessity of facilitation to legitimize the process of engagement that Wolfe and the organizers undertook in commissioning and creating the piece. While Lang himself did not notably engage in facilitation in creating the score for *crowd out,* Illinois Humanities organizers specifically brought in professional facilitators as part of the rehearsal process for the Chicago premiere to encourage conversation around neighborhood arts access during every ward-level rehearsal of the piece. Individual leaders of each ward-level choir also functioned greatly as facilitators, rather than conductors, as they helped to translate the directions of Lang's musical score into a form understandable by participants with widely varying musical experience and mediate their own group's understanding of the reason and meaning for their participation in this larger project.

Facilitation is not a skill that composers and conductors are often trained in, yet it is increasingly a focus of changing music curriculum in higher education (Willingham and Carruthers 2018). The type of organizational work, as well as some of the musical work, undertaken by composers, conductors, and other organizers necessary to make these works-as-performances happen is indicative of the ways that facilitation is increasingly becoming a part of a contemporary musician's skillset. These performances highlight some of the ways that facilitation becomes incorporated into musical structure, and how professional musical artists recognize their responsibility to this skill in performance-based community-engaged work.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- How is facilitation acknowledged in the musical structure of a work and the creative process of composing and performing it?
- How does the role of the composer and conductor change in response to prioritizing facilitation in professional musical practice?

Musical Analysis

Throughout this dissertation, I have also modeled a type of jointly social and musical analysis that I contend is increasingly necessary for conductors to undertake in order to better understand the meanings of their work in and as performance. Such an analytical method reaches beyond conventional score analysis yet is still implicitly related to it. In each of these case studies, score analysis served as a necessary step for understanding how the social meaning of a musical work emerges through sound and performance. By exploring the multi-faceted nature of the many actions of many stakeholders in service of creating and realizing these case study works as both scores and performances, we observe how a score becomes a locus for musically oriented action that reflects and constructs social meaning. In this musical-analytical paradigm, the score is not simply an art object containing its own meaning a priori, but rather a "script" suggesting possible social relations and meanings that may emerge in performance (Cook 2011). The task of the composer, then, is to intentionally set up the preconditions for a certain meaning to emerge, and the task of the conductor-as-analyst to attend to how these meanings are emergent in performance.

My own conviction about the importance of this type of analytical work for conductors has specifically arisen out of studying musical works that foreground their own social materiality. My study here of social practice composition in the choral arts would have been incomplete if I had not also studied the actual relationships that were the textual and musical foundation of these works.

What made these case study works unique were the ways that creators consciously attempted to shape these human social relations through and as part of the musical materials of the performance itself. Yet it also bears noticing here that music is always and eminently social. The process of making music entails a kind of socio-musical work, regardless of whether that work is consciously thought of as part of the ontology of "the music" by its creators. Thus, I contend that the ethnographic research methods I have embraced here would be broadly of use for conductors in studying other performances, and for research on performance itself as foundational to the practice of conducting.

Some choral conductors are beginning to advocate for the use of ethnography and performance research as a way of more deeply understanding the impact of the social work that conductors do in and through performance (Moy 2015; de Quadros 2019; Palmer, Traill, and Ponchione-Bailey 2020). I have similarly here explored how ethnomusicological research methods that attend to the interrelationships between sound structure, social structure, and social meaning can help the conductor and composer better understand the social implications of their artistic work as they undertake to create or perform a work of music. As critical concepts of what "the music" is in other musical-scholarly disciplines embrace performance, human interaction, and social experience as the grounds of musical meaning, conductors too must adopt new research methods to more fully conceptualize the social character of their musical practice.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- How can composers and conductors conceive of musical meaning as constituted through and as social acts of musical performance?
- How can ethnomusicological research methods continue to contribute to the social study of choral conducting and composition as professional practices?

Advocacy, Efficacy, and the Limits of Social Practice

Finally, each of these case studies has illustrated how, as composers, performers, and musical organizers engage with communities outside their own, they necessarily take on roles as advocates for those communities. For these creators, building their status as either spokespersons, allies, or supporters of the communities with whom they collaborated—both within these communities themselves and in the public eye—was a necessary part of their own self-work in creating these musical works. Assessing the extent, efficacy, and responsibility of these works and their creators as advocates represents possibly the largest challenge for scholarship on social practice composition, both in practice and in research; as the goals and norms of advocacy and activism evolve over time, so too do present-day assessments of the aesthetic politics of an artistic work and practice shift and change. Undertaking such a critique of these case studies is, again, beyond my aims here. Still, I find that examining the extent to which creators consciously framed their social practice musical work as advocacy represents one possible way of moving towards best practice, as it opens up avenues for critical reflection.

In creating *Take What You Need,* Esmail specifically spoke about how her collaborators in Skid Row did not want, or need, a piece about the condition of homelessness. She thus did not write one, choosing instead to author a musical-aesthetic space of healing that, in her view, was an actual need of the community that she worked with. Both in her long-term engagement with the community, as well as responding to their needs in the structure of the piece and providing a platform for their voices, Esmail opened avenues for participants to advocate for themselves, while providing a musical performance platform that enabled that advocacy to be publicly presented. Wolfe spoke similarly about how she deliberately made *Anthracite Fields* non-didactic, so that she was not conveying a specific political or cultural message about the mining community. Rather, her aim

was to make her audience, and choral participants, aware of and sympathetic with this particular chapter of American history. Publicly acknowledging her own background as from nearby the coal region, and the piece as a personal exploration of that heritage, also served Wolfe's process of building her public portrayal as an advocate for the history of the mining region, and she was also careful about demarcating what histories and stories she was personally exploring for the first time. As Lang's own work on *crowd out* did not involve engaging with a specific community, he is perhaps the least easy to characterize as an advocate. Still, Lang has spoken vocally and often about how he frames his community-engaged music as challenges for the public (broadly and generally conceived) to come together and solve, positioning himself as an advocate for musical participation itself and the right for people to access the classical musical experience on a creative level. Lang's own self-positioning here reflects the politics of the universal and utopian community that he seeks to portray in his community-engaged works such as *crowd out*. These many steps taken by composers point toward their own understanding of their positionality in relation to the communities with whom they worked, and the importance of consciously framing that positionality throughout the duration of a social practice project as part of the advocate's role.

At the same time, each of these case studies raised questions about how these works may not have been able to advocate for those communities they sought to engage. As already reviewed above, these works did not set out to provide sole platforms for self-expression and self-advocacy by community members themselves, particularly for those perceived or self-identifying as marginalized. It is also tempting, as we consider questions of advocacy, to ask these performances to account for their efficacy in redressing the issues they raise: homelessness, economic stagnation and labor rights, and social and civic alienation respectively. Commentators on social practice art have long realized that, as art-making inches toward advocacy and social work in form, the lines between aesthetics and efficacy become increasingly blurred (Bishop 2012). Any inability of a social practice

project to attempt or effect "real" or lasting social change can thus come to be seen as both an aesthetic and moral shortcoming.

Observing this draws me to suggest that, if and as social practice composition continues to grow, musical scholars and artists alike will need to continue to pursue analytical ways of accounting for these works on the terms that they were created: as musical art-works. Such an analysis does not negate the need to address efficacy when appropriate, but endeavors rather to establish the terms by which social practice composition can be studied as musical art-making: as the culmination of the many artistic decisions that artists and their collaborators make in a work; the intent and meanings that those decisions communicate in performance; the (differing, conflicting, and growing) ways that "quality" and "success" is recognized in a participatory musical work; and the ways in which both the musical and social tools of social practice composition evolve as artists learn by doing. Recognizing the extent and limits of social practice as an aesthetic move by Western classical musical artists, and the attendant politics of advocacy that this entails, remain admittedly crucial areas for further development. My aim here has been to encourage the beginnings of that discussion in fruitful and needed directions through examples of past artistic work.

Key Questions for Future Practice

- How do artists choose to position themselves, and become publicly accepted, as advocates for the communities with whom they work?
- How can artists and researchers account for the type of socio-musical work that takes place in social practice composition as musical art-making?

Conclusion: On Choirs, Composition, and Community

I opened this dissertation by suggesting that, for many choral artists, participants and audiences in America today, the choir continues to resonate as a potent signifier of community itself.

Through a literature review, I examined the multiplicity of ways in which conductors and scholars have used the term "community" to characterize the choir's role and function in Western society, and offered these three case studies of performances of choral works by Reena Esmail, Julia Wolfe, and David Lang as further examples of how this symbolic meaning of choir-as-community served as an impetus for creating new choral music. Here, to conclude, I invite my reader to recall all this evidence, yet consider that I speak primarily now from my own experience and insider position as a choral conductor and composer, reflecting on my own field and practice and what examining these case study works has meant to me and can offer others.

Choirs are imagined, and indeed often practically function, as communal spaces where participants find belonging through mutual experience, interests, and obligation to and with others. Sometimes that sense of belonging is narrowly defined by the mission of an ensemble—a choir based on a shared commitment to a social cause, lived experience, or personal identity, for example. Other times it is more general, such as the commitment of the "community choir," broadly conceived, to the civic life of its neighborhood, town, or city. In its many permutations, this semiotic relationship between "choir" and "community" reveals itself to be a particularly unique combination in its simultaneous complexity and simplicity. The choir is, on the one hand, semiotically dense, as it takes on multiple resonances of community for the many people who see themselves and their communities reflected in the work of the chorus; as community, choir actually means many different things to many different people. Yet choir also continues to quite simply be iconic of community: a group of people commonly committed to a single message through their music-making together, revealing their shared understanding both of the music and of each other. In performance, choir *looks* and *sounds* like community, through its multiple evocations of community's nostalgic and utopian connotations. I suggest that this simultaneous complexity and simplicity—this richness of symbolic meaning—has led to the oft-celebratory tone of writings on community in the choral field.

Because choral musicians understand community as something that we *are,* we are apt to celebrate it without always considering what, precisely, we are celebrating.

Throughout this dissertation, my intent has been to demonstrate how community is not merely a social formation and idea that simply *exists,* but rather one that is actively made and remade by people through social action. Moving beyond just a semiotic reading of community, I endeavored to show how people recognize and understand community through acts of musical creation and choral performance and how, through these acts, people make and re-make the symbolic meaning of choir as community in intentional ways. Taken together, these studies suggest that the choir remains a prominent site where contemporary meanings of community are made, and that composing, creating, and performing new musical works is one way that people endeavor to do this work of meaning-making. These case studies thus prompt us to not take the community of the chorus for granted, but to be accountable to how we—choral musicians, professional and amateur alike—make community through our choices in musical creation and performance.

A symbol maintains its power only through contemporary relevance. Today, we find ourselves at a juncture where historical meanings of community in choir are being questioned and challenged, in ways large and small. These works demonstrate three contemporary re-imaginings of the choir as a symbol of community—as healing, as authenticity, as social capital—and the musical and social mechanisms by which that symbolic meaning comes into being within specific musical events through performance. Composition—the intentional practice of creating new musical works—was seen as a site of musically-oriented action through which the choir as a symbol of community was contested, negotiated, maintained, and re-formed. These works also illustrated some of the limitations of the community that can be made in performance, cautioning against an all-too-common celebratory reading of community and aiming instead for a critical methodology that grounds understandings of community in social action through ethnographic research. Engaging in

such scholarship, as critical reflection on practice, can enable choral musicians to remain accountable to our own work, to explore ways of actually creating the communities that we envision and idealize, and ultimately to question why we idealize certain expressions of community.

In *Cultural Democracy: The Arts, Community, and the Public Purpose,* ethnomusicologist and public arts administrator James Bau Graves writes: "communities provide the context in which culture is invented and sustained. Without an understanding of that context, cultural development is rendered meaningless" (Graves 2005, 25). Throughout this dissertation, I have endeavored to model an applied scholarship that involves a full consideration of the social context of a musical art-making practice, and the responsibilities of creators and participants to each other and society through that practice. Moving our conception of the arts of composition and conducting beyond just the creation and interpretation of "works" and towards "the work" of the chorus invites an understanding, following Graves, of musical creation and performance as cultural development. Encouraging the active development of culture by participants in response to and intersecting with issues of relevance within their own communities is, I suggest, a practical imperative for artists and scholars as they come to more fully conceive of social practice as a part of the professional practice of musical composition and performance. The study of social practice as a compositional art, then, is simultaneously the study of the making of community itself—through, in, and as music.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: New Submission

March 9, 2019

Principal Investigator	Michael Silvers
CC	Patrick John Murray
Protocol Title	*Performing Justice, Composing Community: Social Practice in Recent American Choral Works*
Protocol Number	19570
Funding Source	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship
Review Type	Exempt 2
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	March 9, 2019
Closure Date	March 8, 2024

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

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